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Myanmar is widely known as "The Land of Pagodas" or "The Golden Land" all over the world. It has scenic beauty and historical remains which are inextricable and remarkable. Innumerable pagodas belonging to all ages can be found throughout the country. Wherever one looks within the country one will see Buddha images, temples, simas and pagodas on almost every mound and every hillock.

The Great Mahamuni Buddha Image is one of the most famous of them. This Image is both a sacred religious structure and the repository of the spirit of the entire Myanmar Buddhist people. The location of the Mahamuni Image was Rakhine Dhanyawaddy region which was the inevitable route in the propagation of Theravada Buddhism and Indian influenced culture to various parts of East Asia and South-east Asia.

In this book, the author gives a vivid and detailed description of the Mahamuni Golden Image which is both rich and authentic in architectural and historical value of ancient Rakhine.



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A Guide To
MAHAMUNI

*The highly venerated golden image of Buddha
with authentic long history.*

by

TUN SHWE KHINE, M.A.

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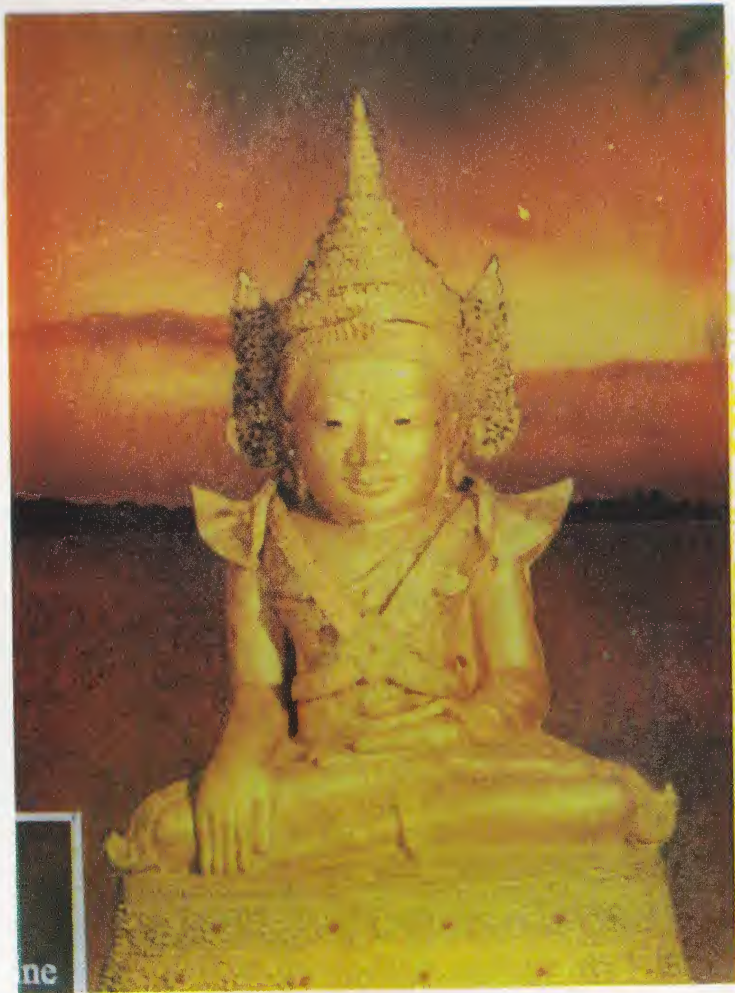
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Rakhine Book Series



The highly venerated Mahamuni-Buddha Image.



Mahamuni Buddha Image.



Very lovely Buddhist tradition in Rakhine.

**Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā
Sambuddhassa.**

နမောတဿ ဘဂဝတော အရဟတော သမ္မာသမ္ဗုဒ္ဓဿ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Minister for Home Affairs, Lt. Gen. Mya Thinn (former Patron of the Rakhine Mahamuni General Renovation Committee) for his invaluable guidance and advice on the writing of this tour guide of Mahamuni.

I am also indebted to my late sayagyi U San Tha Aung (former Director General, Higher Education Department), U Tin Oo (retired chief Editor, University Translation and Publication Department) and U Sann Lwin (Let's Speak English) for their kind help at different times and in different ways.

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Mahamuni Shrine in Rakhine

INTRODUCTION

Maurice Collis, the novelist and the historian wrote a book called "The Land of the Great Image". Although his work is mainly based on the book "The Travel" by Manrique, which revealed the internal affairs of Mrauk-U Royal Palace, he gave the book a title that conveys the meaning of Mahamuni, the Great Buddha Image.

Maurice Collis served as a Commissioner in Rakhine State, the native and original birth place of Mahamuni. He not only went on a study tour to the historical sites there, but also studied the secret and rare chronicles of Rakhine history. He also witnessed the wonders of very profound and sophisticated arts. As he studied through the sacred annals, he must have read the great outstanding features of Mahamuni in the long Rakhine history.

He seemed to have revered the powers of Mahamuni and that's why he retold the interesting story of Mahamuni in addition to the original story and gave the title "The Great Image", (*Mahamuni*).

(a)

I once had a chance to take some University Professors and Scholars from various countries to the historical sites in Rakhine State a few years ago. Even though they have read a lot of books on Rakhine, they found more interesting things than those they have encountered in their reading. They remarked that it was and still is the oldest and probably the most revered Buddhist religious site in South East Asia.

Once I started studying the Rakhine history, just like Maurice Collis, I became more and more interested in Mahamuni and venerated it.

As a secretary of the Rakhine State Historical Commission (1986-1988) and also as a member of the Mahamuni General Renovation State Committee (1990-1993), I had a good chance to study the shrine in many respects. In consequence, I compiled and published "The History of Rakhine Mahamuni" in Myanmar language.

In this book, before anything else, I have presented an account on the ancient city of *Dhanyawaddy* which was the native place of the Great Image.

I have also mentioned the repeated renovations made by the successive Rakhine

(b)

Kings as well as those of neighbouring countries such as the kings of Sri Lankar and Bagan.

In addition, I have described the archaeological remains, the influence of the Mahamuni over the Rakhine civilization, as well as the fact that every pagoda still existing on the various hillocks has a deep relation with the Mahamuni tradition.

At present, the entire view of the hill on which the Mahamuni Shrine exists is the most fascinating sight in Rakhine State. The view from the upper terrace at the shrine is phenomenal and very scenic.

From a distance the multi-tiered roof of the Mahamuni Shrine glitters like a giant ruby in the tropical sunlight. You can pay obeisance to the shrine as an original sanctuary of "the resemblance of Buddha" taken from life.

Besides, the famous sanctuary shrine is rich in archaeological remains, such as images, bronze bells, coins, architectural fragments and all the Mahamuni sculpture. These remains, representing the Buddhist art of ancient Rakhine (almost 1500 years ago), can be seen at the Mahamuni Museum as well as in the old monasteries in and around Kyauktaw.

In addition, we can say that even without looking at the historical annals, one can see

(c)

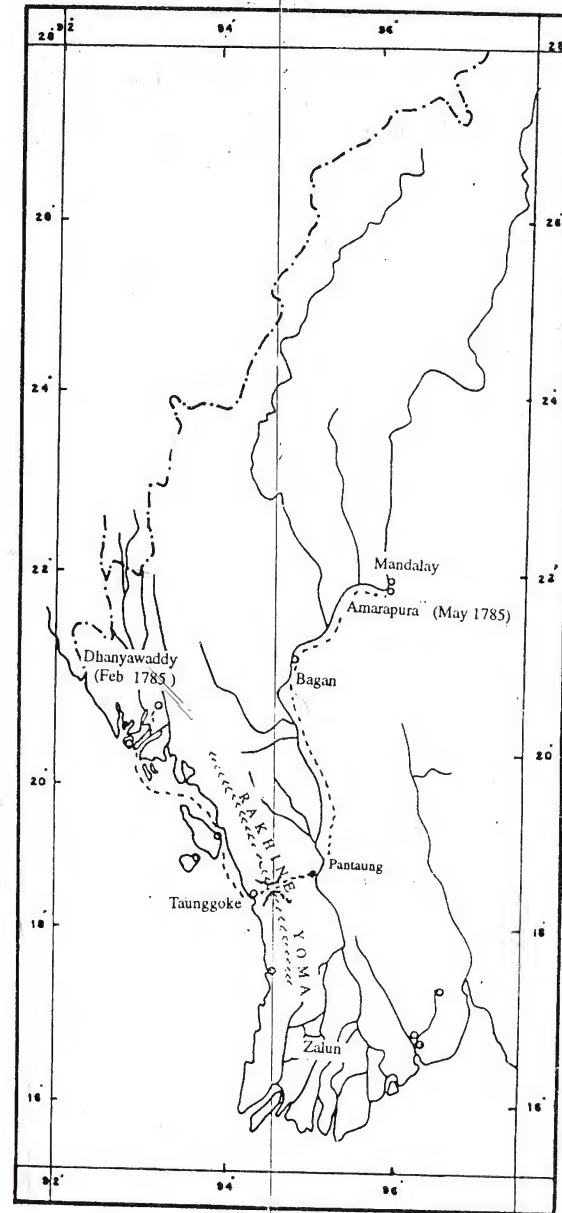
vividly what stage Buddhism had reached in Rakhine State at that time.

Finally, I would like to invite the tourists and visitors to at least pay a visit and have a look at the Great Mahamuni Shrine and the other historical sites in Rakhine State.

Tun Shwe Khine

The Full Moon Day of Kason
24th May, 1994.

The Long Sacred Journey





Pious offerings of the Theravada Buddhists.



One of the golden Buddha images.



The Great Golden Image of Buddha.



One of the Rakhine Buddhist Arts.



The Author

Tun Shwe Khine was born in Rakhine State in 1949; graduated from Yangon University in 1972 and obtained master degree in 1976. He served as a tutor, assistant lecturer and registrar in Sittway Degree College. Now he is the registrar (1) of University of Distance Education. He has written several research articles and books, and edited some books, magazines and journals.

Some of his works are as follows:

(1) Rakhine State Regional Geography, (2) Ancient Cities of Rakhine, (3) The History of Rakhine Dynasty, (4) The Thet Tribe In Northern Rakhine, (5) Rakhine Buddhist Art in Vesali Period, (6) Rakhine Folk-Tales, (7) Earlier Writers in Rakhine Dynasty, (8) A Study of Rakhine Minthami Aye-gyin, (9) The History of Rakhine Mahamuni, (10) Historical Sites in Rakhine, (11) A Guide to Mrauk-U.

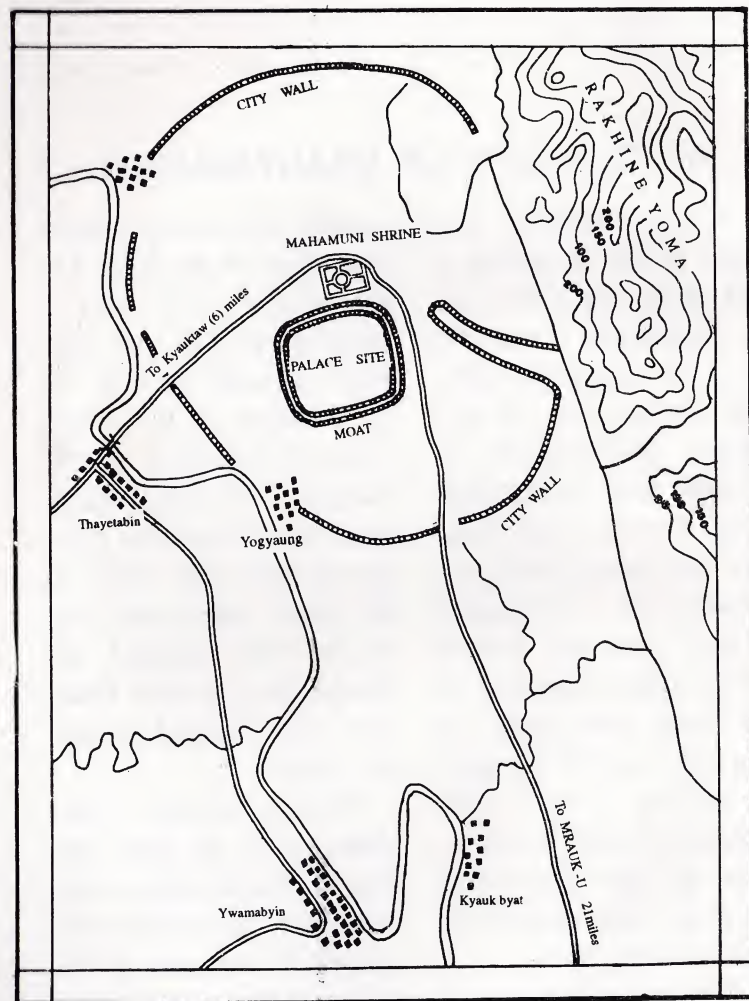
AN OLD CITY OF DHANYAWADDY

Some twenty one miles north of Mrauk-U and about six miles east of Kyauktaw is an old city of *Dhanyawaddy*. The earliest city in Rakhine, *Dhanyawaddy* is situated west of the ridge lying between the Kaladan and Lemro rivers, occupying the well-drained foothill area and backed by the ridge. Remains of the walls and moats of this city can still be seen on many sites. The remains of brick fortifications are still seen along the ridge which protrudes into the city itself.

The old city was of fairly large size, almost circular in shape, with the

eastern wall made of brick at the base of the ridge. On the western side only a small portion of the outer wall remains because of the ravages of the Thare creek, a tributary of the Kaladan. The creek might once have formed the moat on the west side, while on the other three sides the moats had existed although they are now silted over and occupied by paddy fields.

Dhanyawaddy was made up of an outer and inner cities. Looking at the outer city, we find that the east-west diameter is 1.3 miles and north-south diameter is 1.55 miles, so that the shape is that of an



Dhanyawaddy Map



Dhanyawaddy Aerial view

irregular circle. It has a perimeter of about 6 miles and encloses an area of about 1.7 square miles. Within the city, a similar wall and the moat enclose the palace-site which has an area of 64



acres. This inner city, palace-site, is rectangular in shape. The east-west length is about 2,000 feet while the north-south length is about 1,700 feet. The 200-feet-wide moat, circling the inner city, is now covered with paddy fields.

The inner-city was a special site for the royal family. People lived within the outer city which also enclosed the fields they cultivated. The area of the inner city was only 64 acres. In those

days of insecurity, when the country was often subjected to raids by various hill tribes, the people felt safer within the walls. By enclosing the paddy fields, the people would have an assured food supply, even under siege, thus permitting them to withstand the siege. Normally, the city, *Dhanyawaddy*, would have controlled the valley and the lower ridges supporting a mixed wet rice and *taungya* cultivation, with local chiefs paying allegiance to the king.

At the north-eastern corner of the palace-site is the Mahamuni Shrine, on a small hillock, *Sirigupta*, once the centre of the royal worship which had played a central role throughout the history of

Rakhine. This position, in which the shrine sits at NE site of the palace, is the characteristic position found in many other major shrines of urban Buddhist centres in South-East Asia, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka. This tradition may be related to the early royal ancestors. It can be seen in the aerial photographs that this system has been closely followed by the present shrines.

Although *Dhanyawaddy* is located about 60 miles from the sea at present, the city might have been, a sea port at one time. Small sailing ships could have come right up the Thare creek to the city. In any case Indian culture and influence had penetrated the city by sea as well as by land. Perhaps it was the earliest city built

in Indian style, a civilized urban type.

According to Rakhine chronicles, this *Dhanyawaddy* is the third *Dhanyawaddy* (B.C. 580 to 325 A.D.). The city was founded by the King *Sandasuriya*. Nevertheless, after deciphering *Anandacandra* inscription of Shitthaung Pagoda, Dr. E.H Johnston dated the founding of Vesali as 350 A.D. Dr. Sircar of Indian Archaeological Survey also agrees with him. He is not in agreement with the local chronicles, but he has suggested the date of the founding of Vesali to be about 370 A.D.

If Johnston and Sircar's dates concerning the founding of Vesali are accepted, *Dhanyawaddy* must have been the capital

of Rakhine only up to 330 or 370 A.D.

Traditionally, the city is called *Dhanyawaddy* (grain-blessed). The term applies very fittingly to *Dhanyawaddy*, which depended principally on the extensive regions of rice land surrounding it. With a rainfall of over 200 inches a year, the crop never failed. Moreover, there were other things that helped maintain itself successfully.

The problem of fresh water supply was acute on the Kaladan plain because of the tidal creek. For water supply, *Dhanyawaddy* had to rely upon a lot of reservoirs that stored rain water.

The palace-site, at the centre of the city, was the focal point of an irrigation system which can be dis-

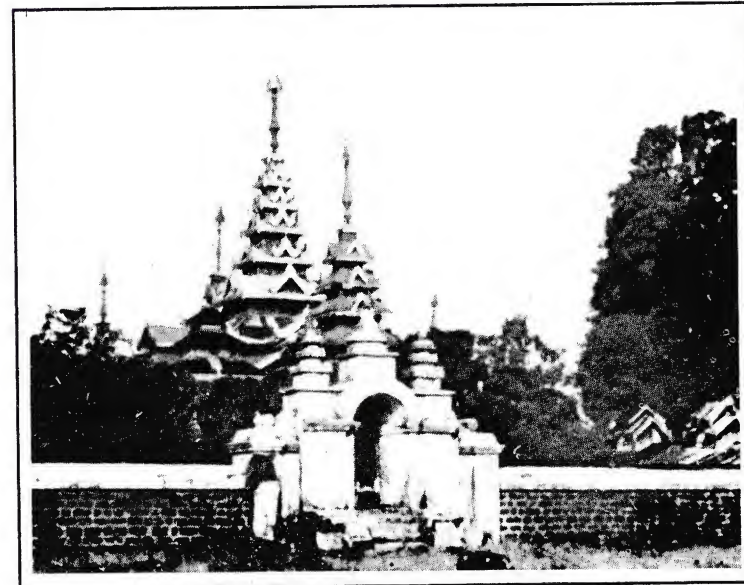
cerned in aerial photograph. Water collected in the wet season had been stored in four main reservoirs in city proper, situated on all four sides of the palace site. The reservoirs on the north, east and west are still in use today, the southern one has recently been silted over. The larger one on the east, situated along the inner moat, also appeared to have supplied water to the palace complex.

The introduction of wet-rice agriculture and subsequent urbanization is reflected in the chronicled traditions regarding the naming of the city. During *Gotama* Buddha's stay in Rakhine. He was said to have declared to his disciples:

"In Jambudipa, among

the sixteen countries of Majjhimadesa the food offered to the monks consists of a mixture of maize, beans, corn, and millet. But in this country, the food offered consists of various kinds of barley and rice; my preceding elder brother Buddhas

(Kakusan, Gonagama-na and Kassapa) had called this country (or this city) Dhanyawaddy and as the inhabitants have never suffered from famine, this region shall in all times continue to be called Dhanyawaddy (i.e. grain-blessed)"



Dhanyawaddy

THE MAHAMUNI SHRINE

Location

The Mahamuni Shrine, one of the most renowned of all Buddhist sites not only in Rakhine State but also in the whole of Myanmar, is situated 6 miles east of Kyauktaw town and 60 miles up the river from the mouth of the Kaladan river at Sittway, the capital of Rakhine State. The shrine was built on a small hillock at the north eastern corner of the palace-site *Dhanyawaddy*, an ancient city founded by the *King Sandasuriya* in B.C. 580.

Traditionalists believe that, the shrine was built to house the image of the Buddha cast during His sojourn on the *Salagiri* hill

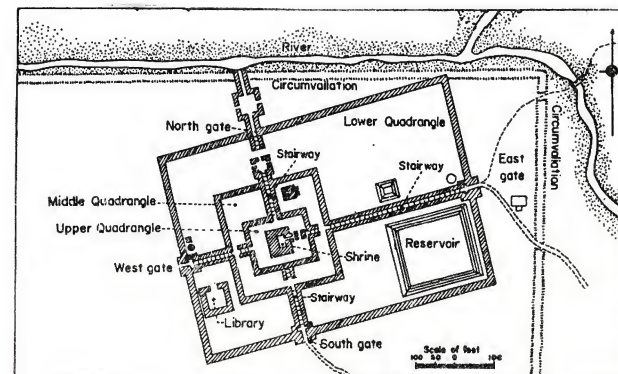
near Kyauktaw in 554 B.C. It was believed that Mahamuni image, the actual picture of Gotama Buddha, was cast by a heavenly sculptor, the Lord of Paradise. Thus, the Mahamuni Shrine which housed the Mahamuni Image has been the focus of attention throughout the centuries since inception. Moreover, this revered image was sought as a prize by neighboring kings, and it has also been the goal of Buddhist worshippers from all over the world to pay homage to this Image. Pilgrims have for centuries come from various Buddhist countries to pay their devotions at the foot of this Great Image.

Sight Around the Shrine

The hillock, on which the Mahamuni Shrine was built is called *Sirigupta* hill. It has three levels of flat surfaces. The Shrine was built at the top level. The whole structure represents three enclosures, one within the other; the second platform is 30 feet above the first and the third is 30 feet above the second. The lowest platform measures 580 feet from east to west and 500 feet from north to south. On each side is an entrance leading towards the uppermost chamber in a

straight ascent 10 feet wide, walled in on both sides. On the first platform there still is an old library built by King Minkhari in 1439 A.D. A large tank dug by *King Sandasuriya*, a small tank walled in with stone, and an *Upasampada* hall, where monks received ordination, can still be seen by visitors.

The second platform is thirty feet above the first and it has an area of 240' × 220'. The north east corner of the platform is in good preservation. At the corner there is a huge banyan tree containing a tree altar consisting of a



Ground plan of the Mahamuni Shrine

layer of square stone blocks surrounding the tree. Tradition has it that Buddha had a rest under this tree while his image was being cast. It is believed that the original Image of Mahamuni remains buried in the ruined cave under this tree.

The uppermost platform is 30 feet above the second. It measures 155' x 115'. The shrine stands on this platform. At the four cardinal points of the lowest enclosure are gates from which covered stepways led to the shrine.

In the central chamber of this shrine lay the throne on which the Mahamuni Image was once placed. Now instead of the original Image,

The Mahamuni Shrine

three stone images of Buddha are seated on a stone altar or pedestals. The central image, known as Mahamuni's brother, is 4'2" high without a seat. The images sit with the legs crossed, the left hand resting on the lap with the palm turns upward, the right knee with the back of the hand turn upward. All



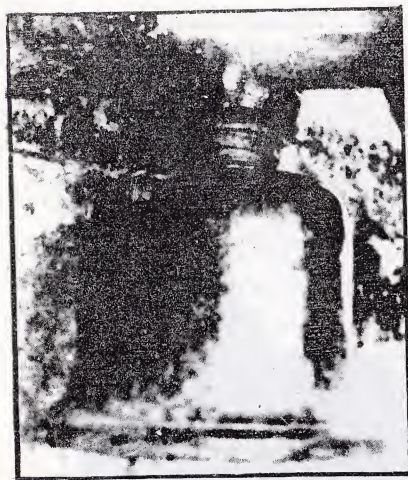
images are known as the crowned-Buddha type or Mahanuni type. The Mahamuni Images are usually placed facing east. The entire religious history of Buddhistic Rakhine centred around the Mahamuni Shrine, which is called "younger brother" of Gotama Buddha. The Image was believed to be

the original resemblance of Gotama Buddha taken from life and was very highly venerated.

In the north east corner there was once the *Yataya* bell. No one hardly ever touched it. It was donated by the King Sandathuriyazara in 1733 A.D. After the first Anglo-Myanmar War, the bell was re-



moved to Sittway and placed in the court-house. The donor, Mg Shwe Hmon removed the bell again to the Mahamuni Shrine in 1905 A.D. Cipher are inscribed on the bell. Now the attractive magical bell has disappeared from the Shrine.



*The Yataya Bell
(cast of gold, silver and copper)*

The Historical Venerations of Buddhist World

According to a palm-leaf manuscript *Sabbadharna-pakarana*, after converting the inhabitants of Dhanyawaddy into Buddhists, the Lord Buddha was requested by the King *Sandasuriya* thus:

"Oh Lord, the crown, the light and glory of three kinds of beings; if you wander about from place to place in distant countries, we shall have no opportunity to pay homage to you. Therefore for my benefit and that of others. I pray to leave for us an image of you."

Thus the Mahamuni and its great image seem to reflect the unity of the three kinds of beings; the

celestial devas, the human beings and the creatures of the other world.

In 81 A.D Supannanagaya Seinda, the King of Srihittaya, invaded Rakhine and saw the Mahamuni Image, which absorbed his mind so deeply that he could not return home for three years.

Captain Forbes remarks (Legendary History of Burma and Arakan, p. 13):

"Supanna invaded and subdued Arakan, and attempted to convey to Burma (now Myanmar) the famous image of Gotama from the temple of Mahamuni. This highly venerated object of worship has been thus described. The image of Gotama is made of brass and highly



The Great Lion

burnished. The figure is about 10 feet high, in the customary sitting posture, with the legs crossed and inverted, the left hand resting on the lap and the right pendent over the right knee".

In the year 327 A.D the King Mahataingcandra founded the new city of

Vesali. The King and his son crown prince Suriyacandra rebuilt a new image house and placed the image in a new altar made of finely carved marble. The spires of the shrine were coated with brass plates. Monks from Bagan and Sri Lanka came to worship the shrine. In 1885 A.D, a possible piece of marble 1'6" long and 9" thick with fine design, was discovered at the eastern gate of the shrine by Dr. Forchhammer, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of Myanmar.

About 980 A.D, the *Saks* came from the northern Rakhine and occupied the shrine. They tried to carry the image to their country. The image had been missing for three years and five

months. A King of Sri Lanka then sent to Rakhine an artisan with a mound of gold and a number of monks accompanied by a thousand followers. With the permission of the then King of Rakhine, the image was restored to its former form and a new image house was built over it.

During the period between A.D 935 and A.D 951 the King of Bagan sent two ministers named Lasaka and Mazalon to the Mahamuni Shrine with the instruction to replace the stone figures of nats and devas with the image of Buddha; but the King of *Vesali* opposed this change and only two of the nat figures were allowed to be chiselled into the images of Buddha.

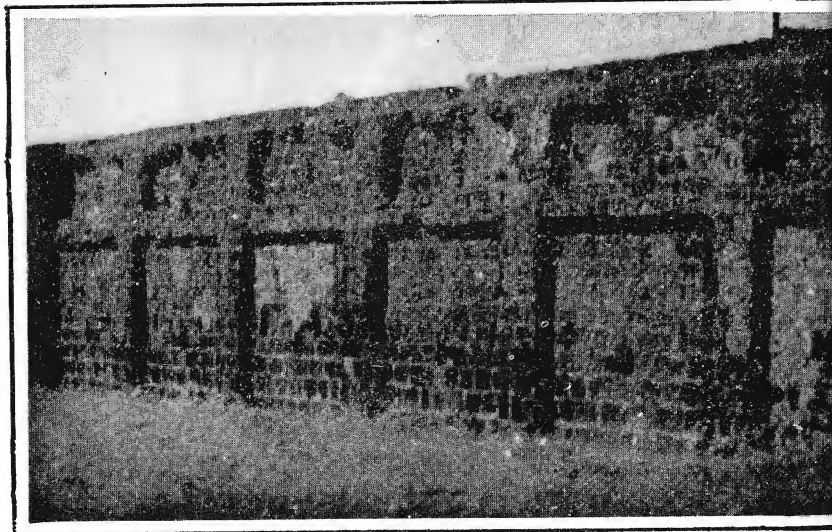


Mahamuni Image

This slab containing the above mentioned figures is now on the east side of the first terrace, south of the stairway. The slab is badly damaged. Two small figures traceable in sitting posture represent Buddha in their usual robes and altitude, and have been chiselled out of the original nat figures by the emissaries of Bagan King.

In the 11th century the great King Anawrahta so-journed from Bagan to superintend in person the rebuilding of the Mahamuni Shrine. He also built a hall in front of the shrine, surmounted by a richly carved graduated turret.

In the 11th century A.D, the Bagan King Alaungsithu sent a minister, 500 noble men, and 50,000 soldiers to Rakhine. They



set up a camp on the west side of the Mahamuni Shrine. Employing good architects to erect a four-sided building over the image, they planted champac trees around it, and repaired the approaches to the Shrine.

In 1103 A.D, Alaungsithu sent Letyaminan with an army to restore the Kingdom of Rakhine. From this event onwards

the Great Image had been lost till the reign of King Koliya who ascended the throne of Rakhine in 1118 A.D. The King Koliya cast another image of Buddha as a copy of Mahamuni Image on the Nandapabbata Hill. The image was cast of gold, silver, copper and other metals collected from the public donations.

In 1123 A.D, Dhatharaza became King. The King was powerful and the country enjoyed general peace and prosperity. Under his orders the Mahamuni Image was searched for and was found buried up to its neck. The right leg and the greater part of the back



Remaining ancient stone wall, a great historic one.



The old site of the Upasampada hall.

were missing. The Image was venerated by the hill tribes as a *Moekaung Nat* (rain deva). The King Dhatharaza built a new Mahamuni Shrine on the *Sirigupta* Hill north-east of palace-site of old *Dhanyawaddy*. He restored the Mahamuni Image to its former form and placed it on the pedestal built within the new shrine.

It is said that the remaining stone walls and northern stairway made

by huge sandstone may have been that this event was a great historic one.

After King Minsawmon had built the new city of *Mrauk-U* in 1430 he constructed a road to Mahamuni Shrine from his palace. The road has been very useful for the pilgrims to the Sacred Mahamuni Shrine. The numerous wells, tanks and rest-houses along the road were donated by the king.

Later, Powar Princess,



daughter of King Minbin, used this road to pay her devotions at the foot of the Sacred Mahamuni Image.

In 1439 A.D, the King Minkhari had a copy of the *Pitaka* (Buddhist Scriptures) prepared in Sri Lanka and entrusted it to the monks who lived near the Mahamuni Shrine for safe keeping. Visitors can find this old and ruined library on the first terrace.

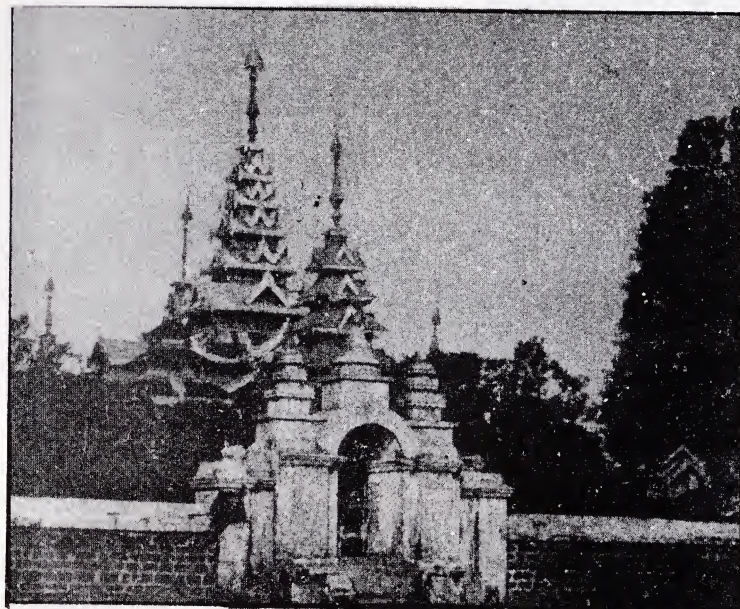
King Minbin, the most powerful king of the

Mrauk-U Dynasty, built the *Shitthaung Pagoda* in 1535 A.D in *Mrauk-U*. In the year 1536, the King had numerous images of Buddha cut to resemble the original Mahamuni type. These copy images, set up at the various pagodas in Rakhine, especially in the *Shitthaung* pagoda, are only the replicas of Mahamuni.

King Minrazagyi, the grandson of King Minbin, who ascended the throne in 1593 A.D rebuilt the old shrine which was donated by King Dhatharaza in 1123 A.D.

Then the monks from the whole of the kingdom were invited to the shrine and one thousand boys are initiated into the Buddhist order (novitiate).

During the reign of King Sandathudhama who



ascended the throne in 1652 A.D, the shrine was consumed by the fire. The king rebuilt and finished it in the year 1658 A.D. In June 1671, the king also reconstructed the Minsawmon's road from the eastern gate of Mrauk-U palace as far as the Mahamuni Shrine. Then his son Ugabhala ascend-

ed the throne in 1674 A.D. In February of the same year the King Ugabhala came to Mahamuni and made his followers drink some special kind of water (loyalty water) in the presence of the Mahamuni Image to show their loyalty. This is a very interesting and lovely tradition. It was closely

connected to the Rakhine monarchy and had served as an important function.

When Wayadhanmarazar became king in 1685 A.D, a great religious revival took place in Rakhine. The king built several monasteries and *Upasampada simas* around the Mahamuni Shrine; eight thousand novices received ordination at these religious buildings.

In 1718 A.D the King Sandavizayarazar renovated the Mahamuni Shrine and built eight hundred monasteries and eight hundred *simas* (Theins). And also planted eight hundred corypha palm trees.

In 1764, during the reign of King *Ahbayamarazar*, the Shrine was again burnt down and was

rebuilt by the king within a year. The King *Ahbayamarazar*, together with his queens and subjects, celebrated festivals in the Mahamuni Shrine.

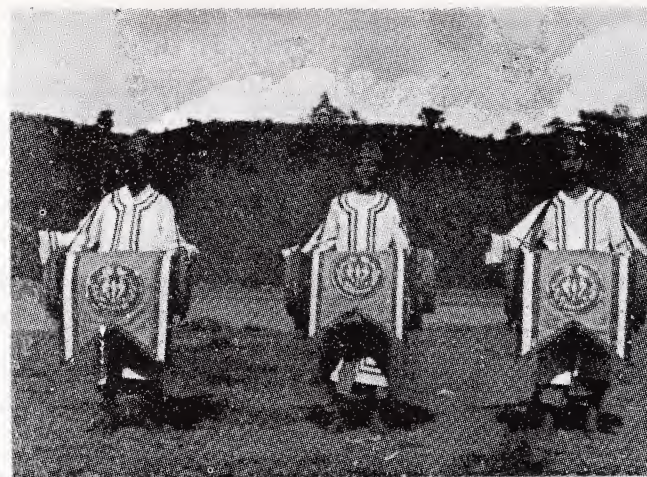
In 1785 A.D the Image was removed to Mandalay by King Bodawpaya. Another highly venerated Image, Man-aung-myin or Pyi-daw-pyan, now at Zalun, was also carried together with Mahamuni Image (see-p-91). These are of the same type and same origin. They show identical features; wide fore-head, finely etched eye-brows, large downcast eyes, prominent nose, protruding lips, a prominent chin and slight smile or compassionate smile. All these Images have the same characteristics, reflecting the sculpture of Rakhine Buddhist art.

Evidences of Architecture and Sculpture

As mentioned above, the Buddhists in Rakhine had highly venerated and repaired the shrine again and again. According to Rakhine chronicles the shrine was destroyed by the fire or by pilferage on many occasions throughout the centuries and thus had to be rebuilt time and again by pious Kings of these centuries. It was being held that its destruction or removal would heralded the fall of the Kingdom. According to the Mahamuni tradition, the stone figures placed at the cardinal points kept away persons who approached the image house with evil intention. These images remain as good evidences at present.



First, the shrine was built on a hillock at the north eastern corner of the palace-site. This position, in which the shrine lies at NE site of the palace, is the characteristic position found in many other major shrines in urban Buddhist centers in south-east Asia and Sri Lanka. This tradition may be related to early royal ancestors. It is



said that all the excavated *Pyu* cities have the main shrine in the northeast of the palace.

Second, the shrine is situated within a rectangular wall, with openings at the four cardinal points, the most important one being that of the east. The temple proper is square in shape, setting towards the west, and is raised over

two broad, almost square terraces. The square plan is typical of early architecture of *Funan* and slightly later of *Dvaravati*. (The Ancient Khmer Empire and Thailand).

The original structural fragments were found in the main shrine. The first one, a caitya arch on a lintel fragment, is now lying at the south western



corner. The figurine in the centre belongs to the late Gupta tradition. The wig-type hair, large cakra earring, round face, downcast eyes and other sensitive expressions are all typical features found among the gana figures at *Bhumara*. The caitya motif is well-known in the art of Funan and Dvaravati, but Mahamuni fragments may well be the earliest example in

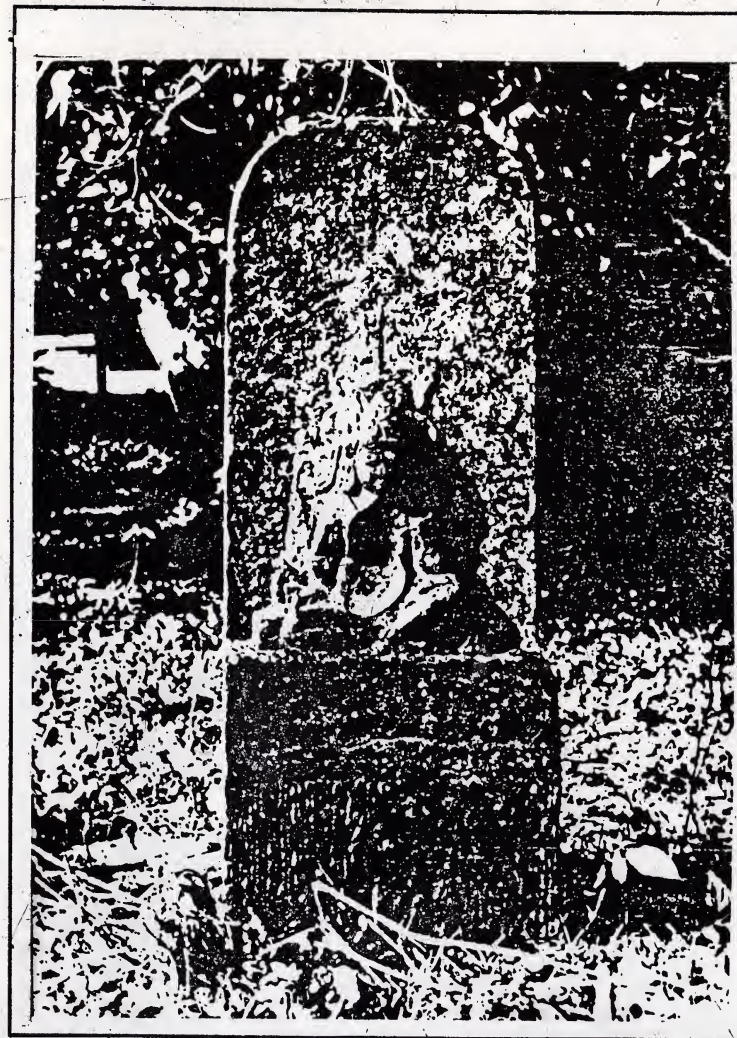
Southeast Asia.

The second fragment is now in the Thein Kyaung monastery at Kyauktaw. It was probably part of a pillar. It is decorated on two sides with a typical *Gupta* lotus medallion, beaded around the centre and with an acanthus pattern outside.

Fortunately one ancient inscription is found at the Mahamuni Shrine, consisting of three lines on



An architectural fragment of lotus medallion.



The inscribed stone image



*Crowned Bronze Image of Buddha.
(Mahamuni tradition)*

the plinth of an image. Now it is placed in a small shrine at the south eastern corner of the second platform of Mahamuni. The script is the

oldest one found in Rakhine or probably in the whole of Myanmar. It is extremely important for the dating of the early phases of the shrine.





Studying paleographically, we can roughly assign the date to be somewhere around the 5th century A.D. This gives us the age of the group of these stone sculptures around the Mahamuni Shrine.

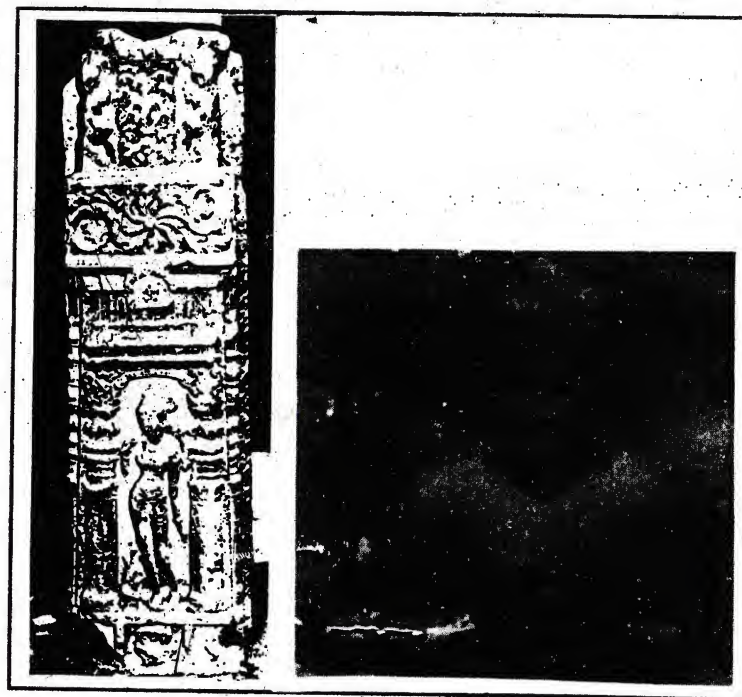
The other sculptures found in Mahamuni are also the earliest ones in Rakhine. They consist of single images, diads and triads. They are made of fine-grained red sandstones. The sculptures are rather similar in design and dress.

Almost all of them have the attributes of royalty such as ornate headdresses, sometimes with crown, earrings, necklace, armlets, bracelets, anklets and a waist band tied in different fashions. The faces of the images are oblong and

have round smooth chins. Most of them are seated with their knees raised in different fashions. The postures of one of the hands can be made out to be either in *Abhaya* or *Varada* Mudras. The other hand may be resting on

the knee or holding a sword.

By studying the appearances of these figures, we can trace a familiarity with the late *Gupta Style* and it must have probably been developed in Rakhine itself and in its own style.





Salagiri Hill

(one of the most famous archaeological site in Rakhine)

Salagiri Hill and Buddha's Prophecies

Salagiri Hill is one of the most famous archaeological site in Rakhine. It is situated on the east bank of Kaladan river 5 miles to the west of Mahamuni Shrine. It is about 250 feet high. This rocky range of hills is known as the *Salagiri*

(The Pali, Sala = rock, giri = Hill, rocky hill) in Rakhine history. The local chronicles assert that during the reign of Sandathuriya, King of Dhanyawaddy, Buddha visited Rakhine with his five hundred disciples and rested on the summit of this hill.

At this site Buddha held a prophetic discourse

on the previous existences during which *He* dwelled in Rakhine. At present there is a standing Buddha image on the top of the hill pointing out to his disciples towards the various places in which *His* former lives had been passed.

Let me present some of the attractive events of the Buddha's prophecies on the traditional history of Mahamuni.

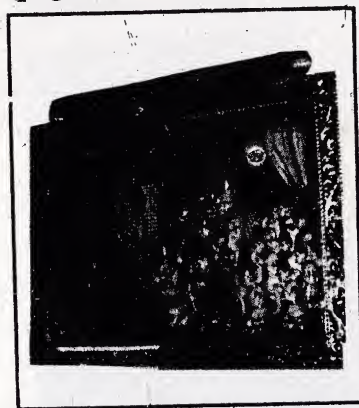
Buddha pointed out to *Dhanyawaddy* and then addressed *Ananda* thus: "*Ananda*, there is a great city *Dhanyawaddy*; here I had been born many times during the former existences. On the north-eastern side of the palace site, there is a hillock named *Sirigupta* where I used to live in a former existence as a master of six thousand Brahmins. On this hill the Great Mahamuni



*Gaechabhanady and Salagiri hill
(a view from the south)*

Image, the actual size of My body even by the breadth of a hair, will be cast and held in veneration by men, *nats* and *Brahmans*, during the 5,000 years after My death (*Nirvana*)”

The hill on which we are resting now is *Mauya-pabbata* (rocky hill) where I lived as a turner during a former existence; on this hill Kyauktaw ceti (pagoda) will be built,



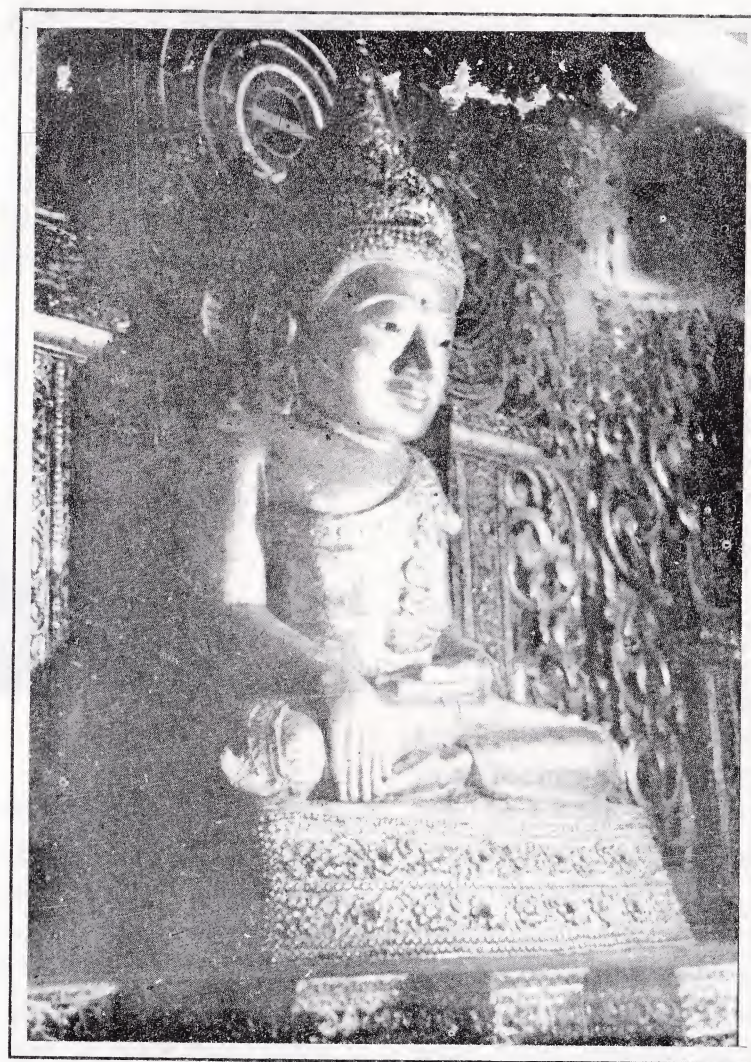
All inhabitants of Dhanyawaddy became Buddhists.

holding My backbone as a relic.

On the east bank of *Randhanady*, south of *Dhanyawaddy*, there lies another hill called *Miga-pabbadha*; on this hill I lived during one of My births as a deer. On My death My forehead-dhat will be enshrined there in a pagoda to be called the *Thinn-gyet-taw-dhat-ceti*.

On the eastern bank of *Gacchabhanady* and close to the ocean, there is a range of hill known as *Salapabbada*; there I formerly spent a life as a fisherman. On the hill the *Mrengu-dhat* pagoda will be built containing My chin-dhat as a relic. Now it is called *Mre-Ngu-Kyun*, situated at the mouth of Kaladan River near Sittway.

close to the south of



The highly venerated Buddha Image of Mahamuni.

Salapabbadaa, there is another hillock named *Nilapabbada*. It is rocky and very close to the ocean. When I rested on the top of the hillock, eight *Nagas* came from the ocean and paid respect to Me. On My footprint a pagoda will be built to receive as relic the hair of My head; the pagoda will be called *Sandawshin ceti*. Now the *Sandawshin* Pagoda is quite well-known in Rakhine State.

At the end of this prophecy the great earth with *Meru-Myinmoe* as its centre trembled and shook, and the sea became wavy and roared.

On perceiving these portentous signs, King *Sandasuriya* took fright and discussed his seers and advisers what their causes might be. They

answered that these signs were caused by the advent of Buddha.

The king was very happy. Followed by the chief queen; numerous ministers, 16000 maidens

and a large number of soldiers, King *Sandasuriya* went towards *Salagiri* hill on foot to pay homage to the Blessed One.

When the king and his followers arrived at the top of *Salagiri Hill* in the

presence of Gotama Buddha, he approached Him on foot, holding flowers and perfumes in his hands; he embraced the teacher's feet and ordered parched rice, garlands and

tants of *Dhanyawaddy* became Buddhists. King *Sandasuriya* bowed to Buddha and requested to leave an image of Him. Buddha agreed with the King.

The King *Sandasuriya* was very glad and collected nine *kutis* (90 millions) worth of treasure. When everything was ready Buddha called upon *Sakra* and *Visvakarman*, and issued the following instruction.

"Take these treasures and make an image of Me which shall not vary from the actual size of My body even by the breadth of a hair"

He then handed the treasures to *Sakra*, seven handfuls on all. With the intention of detaining the Blessed One till the image was finished, *Sakra* and



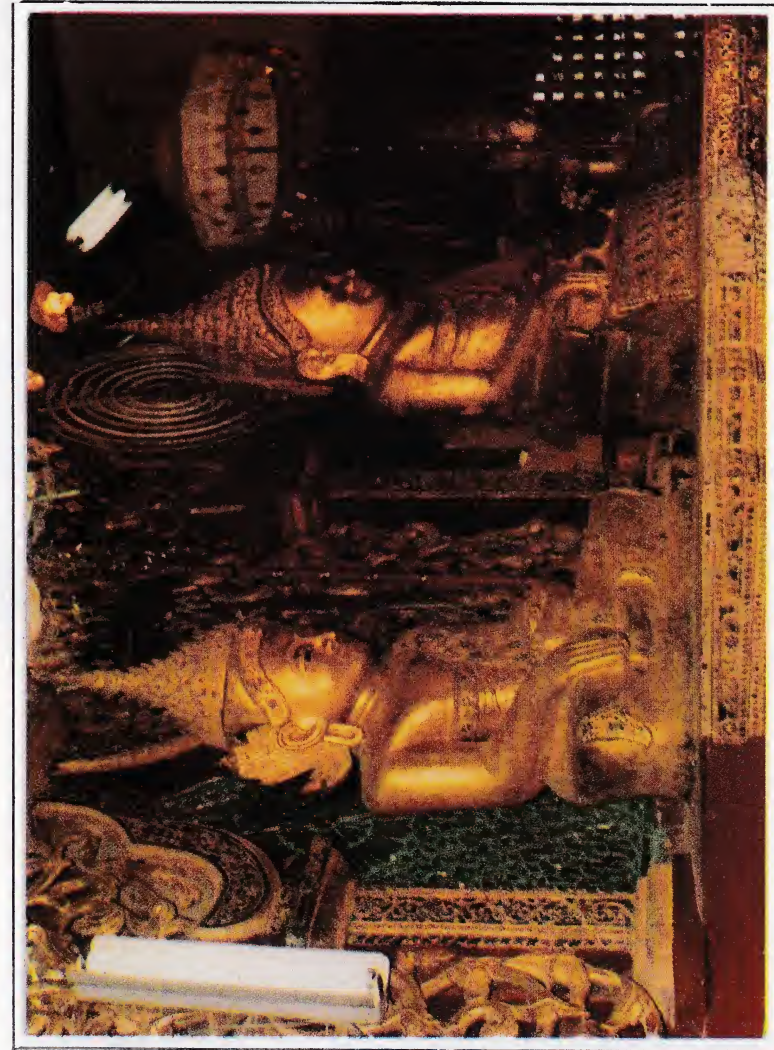
perfumes to be showered upon Him. The Blessed One established the king in the five, eight and ten silas, and preached him the ten rules of kindly conduct. After the Lord Buddha had preached them, all inhabi-

Visvakarman created by their power a pleasant pavilion on the *Siriguptta* hill situated at the north-east of the city of Dhanyawaddy.in *Mahasakkarit* 123, on *Thursday*, on the first waning day of Kason at sunrise, Sakra and Visvakarman cast an Image which was said to be exactly like the Blessed One. As the Buddha breathed upon the Image, he impart life into the image. It became so life-like that to the eyes of men, nats, sakra and brahman there appeared as if there were two Buddhas. The king and his attendants were overwhelmed with joy and offered various kinds of flowers and perfumes, coloured parched rice, torches, lamps and shouted *Sadhu, Sadhu*,

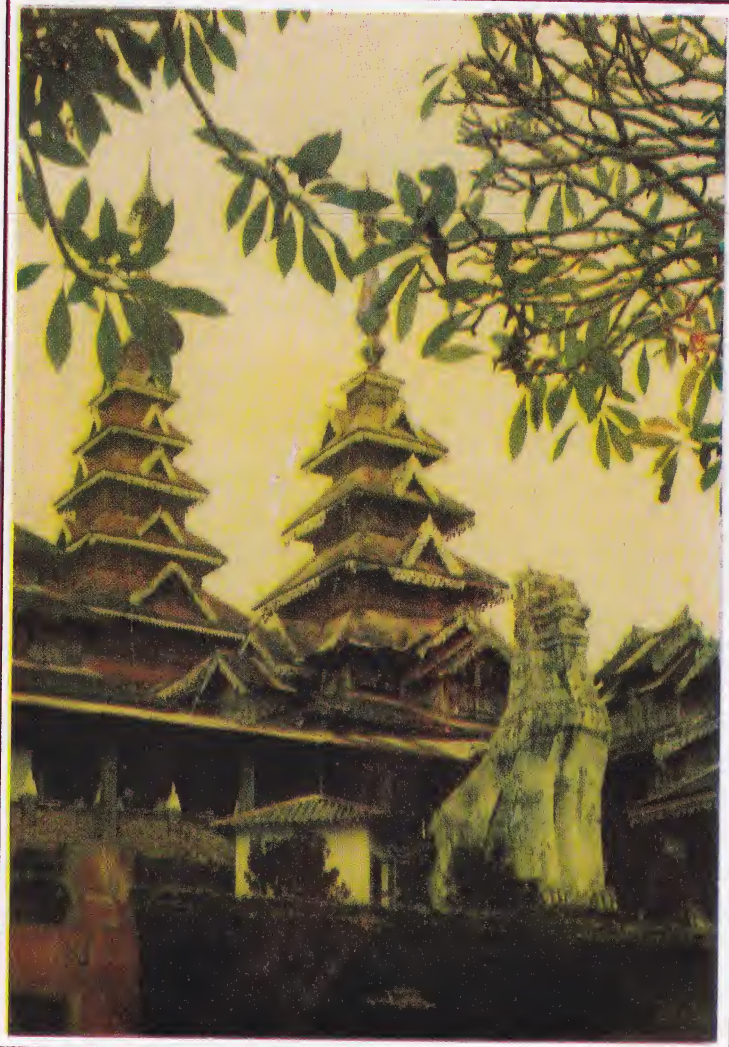


Sadhu (Well-done). Gotama Buddha said to his younger brother (to the Image):

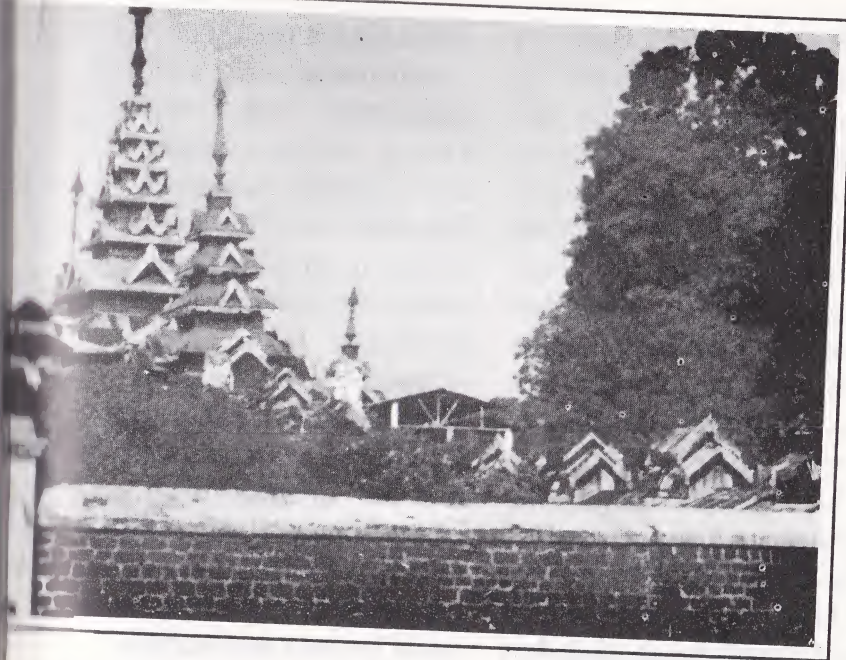
"I shall enter Nirvana; but you, endowed with the supernatural powers of a Buddha, shall exist for ever, you shall be the



Rakhine Buddhist Art.



*Mahamuni Shrine.
Theravada Buddhist style.*



*Siriguta Hillock
(The original sanctury of Mahamuni Buddha Image.)*

*means of promoting
the salvation of men,
nats, and brahmans.*

Close to the top of the
Salagiri hill are one Bud-
dha image in a reclining
posture and two small
pagodas. From the top

there is a good view of the
central plain of Kaladan
Valley.

After Buddha had de-
parted from Dhanyawad-
dy, King Sandasuriya
built a small pagoda on
top of the hill. In 1624

A.D King Siridhamaraza repaired this pagoda.

From that time onwards, the Salagiri hill has become the focus of attention for the pilgrims from various Buddhist countries. Moreover, a few archaeological remains were found from this hill.

In 1885 Dr. Forchhammer discovered the two line inscription among the ruins of Salagiri pagoda, traditionally built by King Sandasuriya, on a block of sandstone about 1 feet long. He noted that it once might have formed part of the throne of an image. The inscription may paleographically be assigned to around the beginning of 6th century A.D.

A miniature stone stupa, total height (without missing umbrella) 3' 8"

was found at the corner of a mound south of this hill. Fortunately the well-known Buddha's preceding *Yedhama* verse was inscribed on it. The paleography roughly suggests a date in the first half of the 6th century A.D.

In 1923 A.D a stone slab 2' high and 1'4" broad was found at the base of this hill. This is a surviving example of relief sculpture of the early period. On the slab it could be seen that Buddha was sitting, hands in *Dhamacakya* Mudra, his right knee slightly raised on an undecorated square throne. At his feet sits a man, richly ornamented, perhaps a King. This scene represents the Mahamuni tradition. In this tradition, Buddha came to Rakhine and rested at the Salagiri

hill. King *Sandasuriya* came, from a distance of 5 mile east of the hill, to Salagiri on foot to pay homage to Buddha who preached him and the inhabitants the *Dhamacakya* sermon. The style of hand and headdress indicated that, it should be dated earlier than 5th century A.D.

In 1986 A.D another five stone slabs were found buried in a mound, a demolished pagoda, near *Shinmakyat* situated at the foot of the southern Salagiri. Each slab measures 2' high and 1'6" broad and very similar to previous *Dhamacakya* mudra slab. Each slab contains a bas-relief representing one particular incident of the Master's life of Buddha. The following five scenes were depicted by artists

(1) the enlightenment (2) Preaching Buddha (3) the mahaparinirvana (4) the donor King figure and (5) the Bhumisparsha mudra. It is possible that these stone slabs once formed parts of a huge temple of pagoda built as a Buddhist museum containing Great Events of Buddha's life.



THE LATEST DISCOVERIES OF BUDDHIST SCULPTURES

*Buddha in preaching style
(Fine artistic workmanship)*



The Relief Stone Sculpture of Preaching Buddha

I will present here two of these stone slabs showing Great Events of the Master's life. Both of them are at present in the Mahamuni museum of Kyauktaw township.

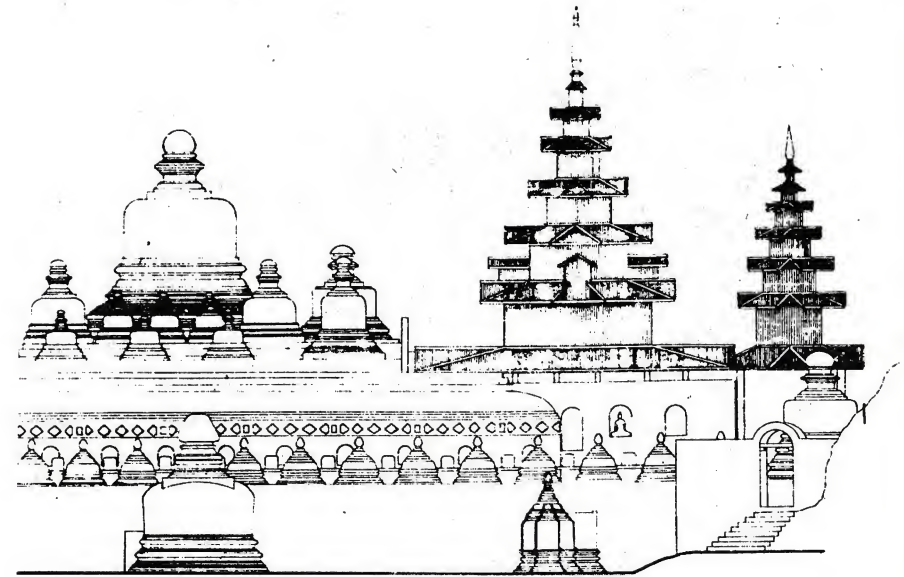
The first one is a scene in which Buddha seems to be preaching to one of his converts, possibly a hermit accompanied by a Buddhist monk.

This Buddha image has an elliptical hollow (*prabhavali*) behind his head but not obvious. The hair

style has rows of wavy knots of the curly hair. The rows above the forehead are curved slightly downwards and only a small cranial protuberance (*usnisa*) is noticed. The slight downward curving of the rows above the forehead are similar to those of *Sarnath* style. But the facial features are not like Indians. The facial expressions, such as finely-etched eyebrows almost meeting at the centre, downcast eyes or meditative eyes, prominent nose, and full lips might be the characteristics of a Rakhine national of Myanmar. Perfect happiness

or compassionate smile appears on the face of the Buddha image for having a chance of preaching to some of his fresh converts.

The ear lobes are outstanding and touching the shoulders. The monastic garments typical style of the *Sarnath* school cling simply over the body. In this figure, the right shoulder is bare. The upper garment (*uttrasanga*) falls gracefully forward over the left shoulder and left arm and an *antaravasaka* is apparent at the waist exposing the knee. But the garments are not expressed else where over the body as in the

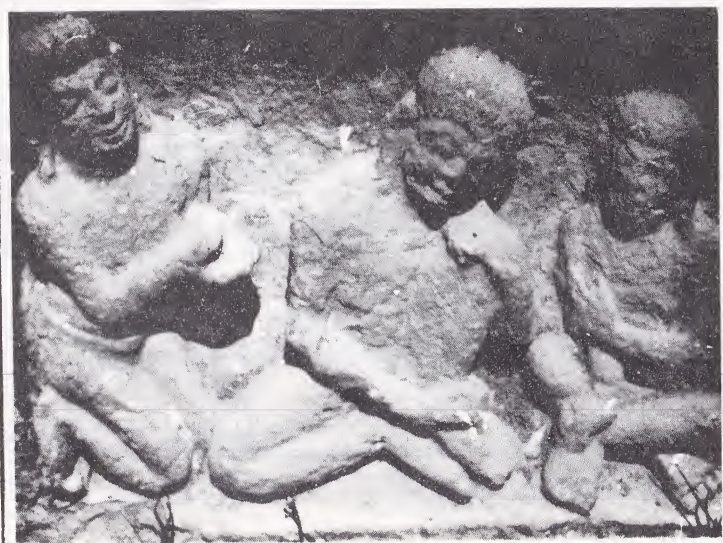


Cross-section of Shitthoung pagoda.

Sarnath style. As a whole, the drapery recalls the seated Buddha images of *Dvaravati* of the 7th century A.D.

The Buddha sits in a natural manner on an undecorated rectangular pedestal. The legs rest down below. Under the legs of the Buddha image is a fine lotus plint flanked by two deer kneeling and facing towards the Buddha image.

On both sides of the pedestal below the Buddha image are two human figures kneeling in prayers and listening to what Buddha says. The figure on the right is possibly an adoring monk and the other figure on



To save Buddha's life.

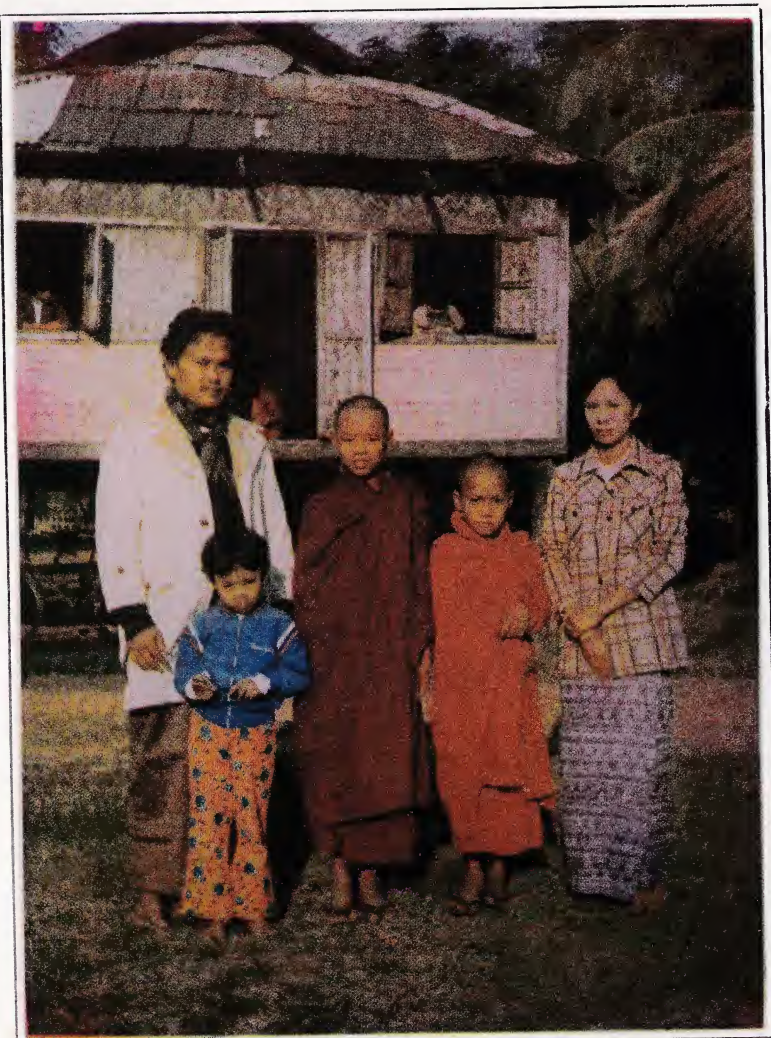
the left may be a hermit probably on account of his long beard and long hair.

This posture of Buddha image and some other attendant figures such as a monk, a hermit and two deer cause me to recall the *Yedhamma* verse and its background history.

After having attained the Enlightenment at Bodhgaya, Gotama, now a Buddha, went to the *Deer Park* (*Mrigadava*) at Sarnath, near Benares, and preached His



Preparations before Shin-pyu-mingala.



An auspicious day of their life.

First Sermon, Dharmacakra, to the five ascetics who were His former companions. These five ascetics became His first disciples. Buddha then proceeded to Rajagriha where King Bimbisara gave him the park known as the *Bamboo grove (Wailuwun Vihaya)*. Buddha converted many other ascetics. While Buddha and His disciples were sojourning there, a remarkable incident occurred. Assaji, the youngest of the five disciples, went into the city of Rajagriha with his alms-bowl, where he met an ascetic. His name was Upatisya who later became Shin Sariputra, one of the chief disciples of Buddha. Upatisya, a hermit, was greatly impressed by Assaji's dignity and composure and followed him to ask who his teacher was and what his teachings were. Assaji replied that his teacher was Gotama Buddha, but he could not explain the Buddha's teachings very well because of his being newly ordained. The eager Upatisya, however, insisted Assaji to tell him a little of what he knew. At last Assaji complied by reciting the *Yedhamma* verse. On hearing the verse Upatisya became a Buddhist monk and later became one of the chief disciples with the name of Sariputra.

This stone slab is a representation of a scene of Buddha's preaching to one of his converts and of fine artistic workmanship. By looking at the sitting posture, the garment and head headdress, it should be dated between 4th and 8th century A.D.

The Artistic Workmanship of Buddha's Death Scene

Now I am going to present another stone slab. This is the *mahaparinirvana* scene showing Buddha's dying posture which is the last one of the four (4) principal incidents of the Master's life. In the upper portion, Buddha reclines underneath the *Ingjin* trees (sal trees) before His death. But there is no sign of grief on His face for dying, and He uttered His last Dharma and dying wishes to His disciples.

Buddha and His disciples had travelled far and wide and converted many people to Buddhism on their way. He had many disciples and most of the inhabitants at various countries and city-states such as Varanasi, Kapilavastu, Sravasti, and Rajagriha became Buddhists. Even the greatest Kings of those days favoured Buddha and His *Sanghas*. For about forty five years Buddha and His sanghas travelled from place to place preaching to people from all walks of life and He reached His eightieth year. Then He was at Pava near Vaisali during the rainy season. Buddha had a meal at a goldsmith's house where He ate rice and a well prepared dish containing pork. After the meal Buddha was attacked by dysentery. Despite His illness He walked on to Kusinagara (modern Kasia) and laid down between two sal trees. When Buddha was suffering from the effects of the pork meal, He became very thirsty and asked Nyidaw Ananda three times for water. Buddha asked

Nyidaw Ananda not to weep. As a matter of fact, all the disciples grieved over their Blessed One's dying. They tried their best to save Buddha's life and they called in the most well known physician of the time and asked him to cure the Buddha's illness.

Then Buddha asked if anyone had any more questions; when there were none, Buddha passed through trance and died (*parinirvana*).

In the bas-relief sculpture, there are three human figures under reclining Buddha. the central figure should be Nyidaw Ananda who seems to be grieving. On the left seems to be a physician who is preparing medicine. The figure on the lower right

could be Subhadha, the Buddha's last convert.



Mahaparinivana Scene

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF MAHAMUNI IMAGE



(1) **Crowned Buddha**

Mahamuni Image is dressed up with all the attributes of a king. It shows that Buddha had been regarded as a Devatideva, god of gods or king of kings. Anyway, Buddha is also a Great Being, a deity and the glory of the three kinds of beings, whether He appears in monastic robes or in royal robes.

(2) **Facing East**

Mahamuni Image always faces east. It is the representation of *Enlightenment*, one of the Great Events of the Master's life. It carries the ideas of priority, success, good foundation, originality and auspiciousness.

(3) **Bhumisparsa Mudra**

Mahamuni Image performs *Bhumisparsa* mudra and sits on a

decorated throne. In this mudra, the left hand rests on the lap with the palm upward and the right palm down resting on the right knee and touching the ground below. The representation of the Enlightenment and the incidents have a relation with the above mentioned mudra and with the favorite themes of the Buddhist artists of all schools. According to the well-



Face of Mahamuni



known events of Buddha, He, by touching the earth, gave notice to the Earth Goddess *Wathon-darei* to come and be the witness of his accomplishment. This mudra indicates the moment when he ceased to be a *Bodhisattva* and became Buddha. The Blessed One did this because *Mara*, the evil one, came to attack with his numerous followers. This posture *Bhumisparsa mudra* can be interpreted as the victory over evils or enemies as well as the

strength, stability, steadfastness and solidarity.

(4) **Virasana Sitting Posture**

The legs are folded and overlapped with the feet brought to rest on the thighs and the soles of the feet turned upwards with the right leg on the left leg. This is called *Virasana*. This sitting posture *virasana* stands for the assurance of fearlessness, tranquillity, auspiciousness, and protection given by the Mahamuni Image. It is believed to be a sign of success.



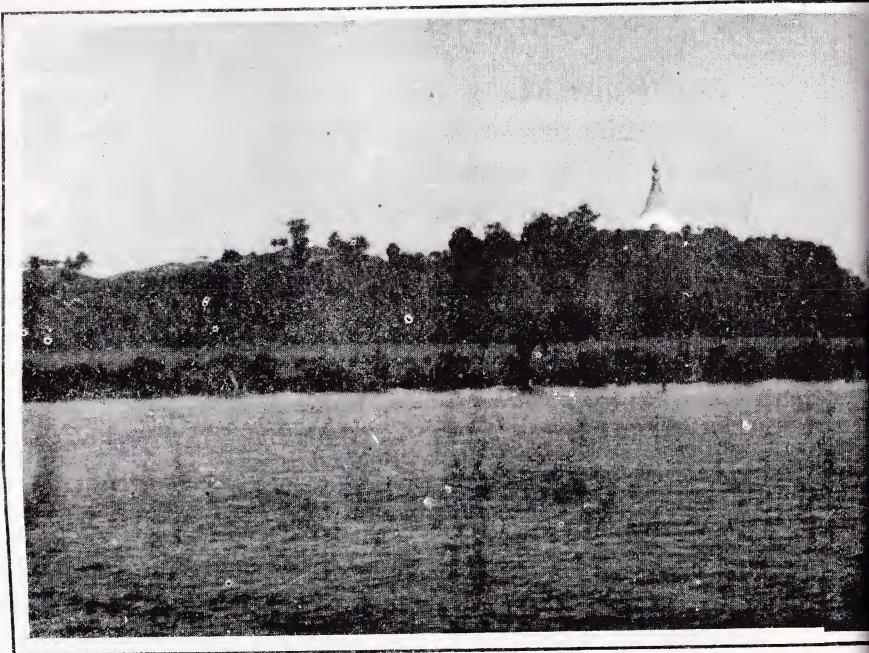
(5) **Compassionate Smile**

Mahamuni Image has a remarkable face. Just by seeing the outstanding face of Mahamuni Image, one can feel how fine the art of sculpture is. Wide forehead, prominent nose, finely-etched eyebrows, almost meeting at the centre, downcast eyes, full lips and slight smile

denote the compassionate smile face of Mahamuni. It is very highly venerated. Hundreds of copies in temples and pagodas in Rakhine and beyond are reputed to be replicas of the original copy of the Blessed One. In fact, it is impossible for anyone to copy the exact facial expression of the Mahamuni Image.



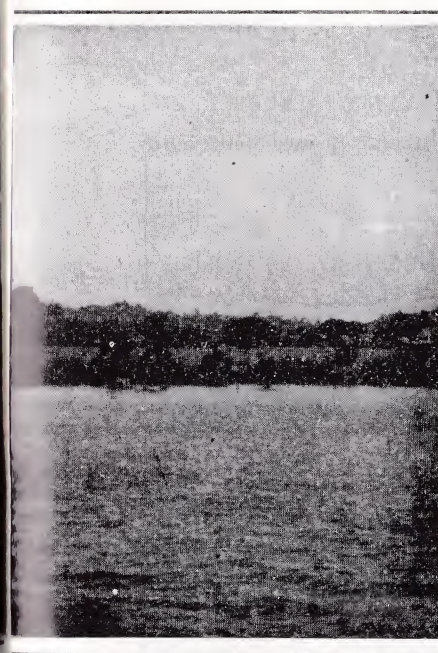
*Mahamuni Buddha Vihaya.
The grain blessed land.*



THE LAND OF RICE

The Blessed One addressed His disciples thus:

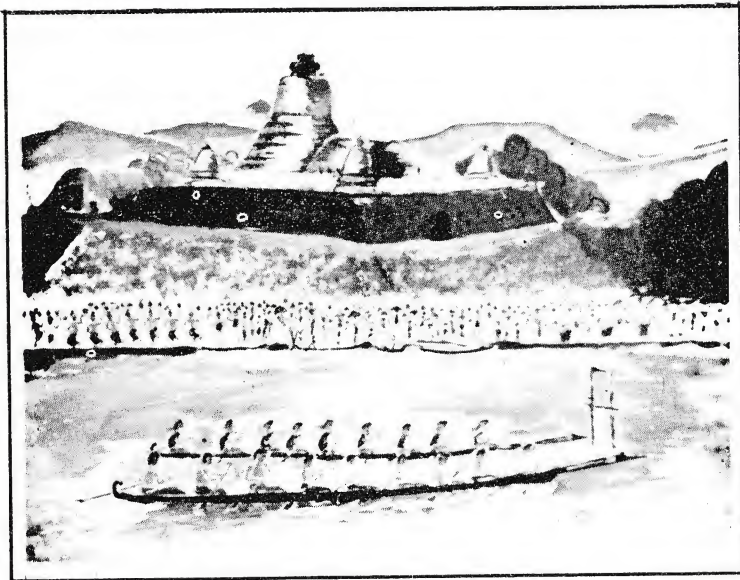
"O Rahans, my beloved sons! In the island of Jambudipa and among the 16 countries of Majjhima-desa, the food offered to the monks consists of a mixture of maize, corn and millet and beans. But in this country, the food offered consists of various kinds of barley and rice; my preceding elder brothers (Kakusan, Gonagamana and Kassapa, i.e. the three



*Paddy-fields
in grain-
blessed land
Rakhine.*

Buddhas who preceded Gotama) have called this country Dhanyawaddy and as the inhabitants have never suffered from famine, this region shall in all times continuously be called Dhanyawaddy (i.e. the grain blessed)".

Since then the land has retained that name. This term applies very fittingly to Rakhine, whose wealth depended principally on the extensive regions of its riceland, with a rain fall of over two hundred inches a year and the crop has never failed. There are always plenty of grains in the fields seasonally.



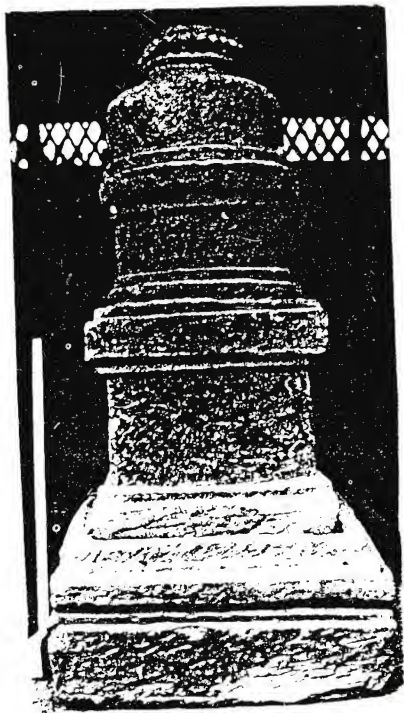
*The Dukkhanthein pagoda and
Rakhine traditional boat race.*

THE LAND OF PAGODAS

After the Lord Buddha had preached the people of Rakhine Dhanyawaddy, they became Buddhists. Throughout the centuries, ever since the introduction of Buddhism up to the present time, Rakhine professed Buddhism without any break. The Mahamuni Image formed the center of religious worship. After Buddha's

parinirvana the stupas or cetis became monuments erected over relics of Buddha all over the Buddhist world. And because Buddhists revere the relics of the Blessed One, it naturally follows that stupas (pagodas) should play leading role in Buddhist architecture following the Mahamuni tradition.

Pagodas were built on tops of hills by the Kings and public donors through the generations. Thus innumerable pagodas belonging to all ages can be found on the historical sites in Rakhine. But old pagodas dating before 1000 A.D are now extremely rare. They have either collapsed due to weathering (annual rainfall in the Northern Rakhine is over 200 inches), or have been demolished by treasure hunters, or have been enshrined in pagodas repaired by the later kings. According to the inscription of Viracandra (ဝိရခန္ဓာ) who reigned Rakhine Vesali between 575 A.D and 578 A.D, he had built as many as one hundred stupas during his three-year reign. There is no doubt, however, that (the pagodas) were once plentiful. To date, over seventy stone inscriptions bearing Gupta characters and the Yedhamma verse in full have been found at the various sites in Rakhine. By studying the characters used in inscribing the verse by palaeographical methods, we found these inscriptions to be the remains of the old pagodas or cetis, constructed before the 6th Century A.D. No one can identify the form or structure of these ruined pagodas.



Stone Stupas

Recently, several miniature stone stupas with the Yedhamma verse inscribed on them have been recovered in the vicinity of Mahamuni Shrine. Let me present one of them. It was found near a mound

south of the Salagiri hill which was related closely to Mahamuni tradition. This miniature stupa consists of two portions. The lower position is a square base which may be regarded as a plinth. The height of the plinth is

about seven inches. The upper portion is the stupa proper, about two and a half feet in height. This upper portion has a square platform made to coincide the square base. Above this platform is a cube. The *Yedhamma* verse, a wellknown Buddha's teaching, is inscribed on one side. Then there is another square platform on the cube. Above the platform are three terraces, and above the terraces is the cylindrical drum decorated with three bands around it. The middle band is broader and thicker than the other two. The top of the cylinder is hemispherical. It looks like an inverted bowl or a bell. On top of the hemisphere is a ring of beads surmounted by a mould which support the *hti-daw*

(umbrella). By studying the inscriptions on this stupa, we can roughly estimate the date to be somewhere around the 5th century A.D.

This stupa may probably be 1500 year old and prototype of present day pagodas. This is probably the early stage in the evolution of pagodas. There is no niche on any

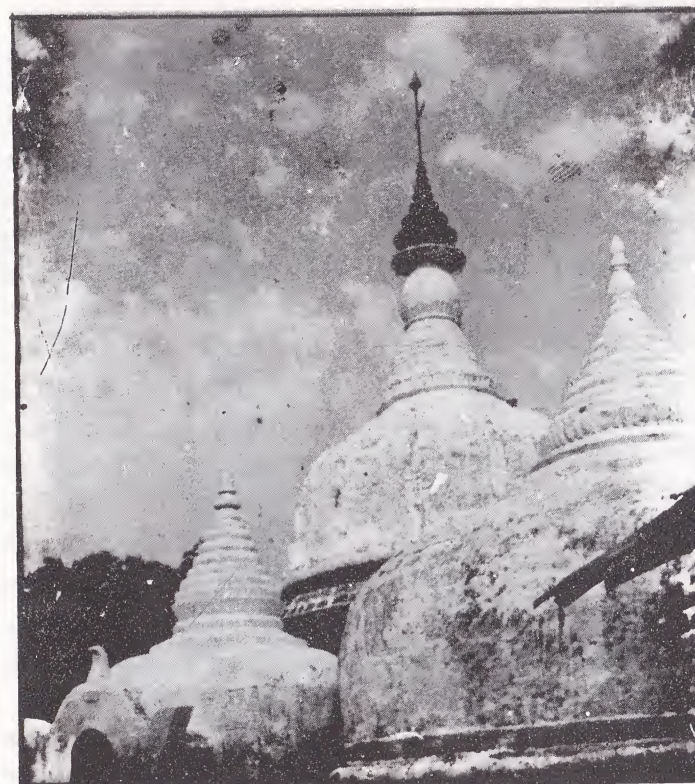


*The inscribed stone stupa
(5th century A.D)*



side of the drums. Later architects developed a new idea by adding four niches facing the cardinal points. Today four Buddha images are usually figured around the pagodas.

Some pagodas such as Shitthaung pagoda, Andaw shrine, Dukkhanthein, Laymyetnha pagoda, (built around 16th century A.D) in Mrauk-U period are generally similar to the



above mentioned stupas Shitthaung pagoda (16th century A.D). The above descended from the old mentioned stupas are at Vesali's stupas. You can present in the Mahamuni museum. You won't find compare the form of this miniature stupa (6th century A.D) with that of study it as you wish.

Ancient Miniature Bronze Pagodos or Cetis

I have mentioned that earlier kings of Rakhine dynasty had built many cetis or pagodas at various sites and cast many images in the shrines in accordance with the Mahamuni tradition. Today almost every hillock in Rakhine State is crowned with a pagoda. The pagodas are generally similar in structure and differ only in details. But you can rarely come across pagodas built before 10th century A.D. However, we found a few miniature bronze pagodas out of the ruins of the old pagodas near ancient Vesali city site (A.D 327 to 818).

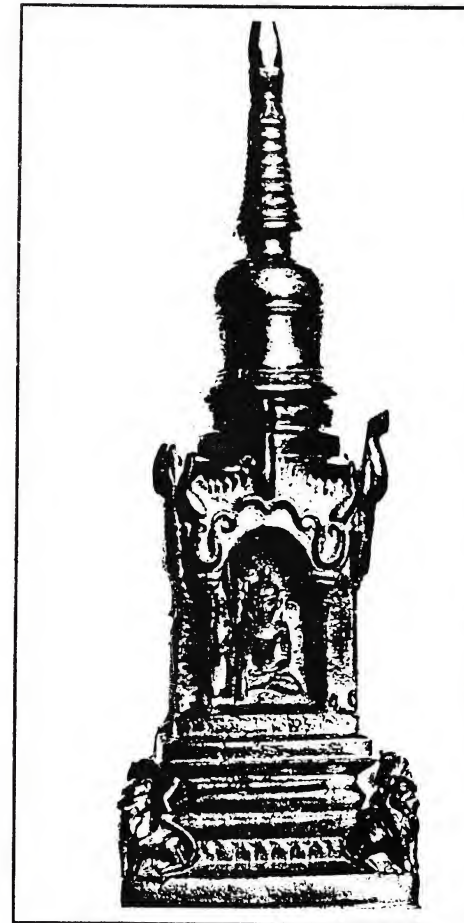
As the ruined pagodas may be dated somewhere between the 4th and 9th

centuries A.D, we may generally assume that bronze miniature pagodas were made at about the same time. By studying the outward appearance of these bronze pagodas, we can assume that they are really very old and can be the prototype of present-day pagodas. Although no one can say for sure, it is interesting to compare and find out the similarities between these miniature pagodas and the full size pagodas existing today.

In my opinion, these bronze miniature pagodas may have been at the early stage in the evolution of pagodas.

The oldest stupas are full hemispherical domes like Sanchi stupa which has no niche. At a later period, a solid cylinder or drum was added beneath

the hemisphere. Later still a square piece of stone came to be placed on top of the hemisphere.



This square piece acted as the support for the hti. Later a niche is attached or added to one side of the

drum. Later architects developed this idea by adding four niches to the drum, each niche facing one of the cardinal points. Each of these niches contains an image of the Buddha.

now, I am going to present a miniature bronze pagoda which was found in *Tharlarwaddy* village which is located within the southern city walls of

An ancient miniature bronze pagoda.

old Vesali city. It is about 6 inches high and can be seen in the Buddhist museum in Sittway.

The miniature *ceti* (see p-61) has a square pedestal wrought in the form of a royal throne. Four guardian lions sit at each corner of the base platform. On the pedestal is the image hall. This tiny hall has four openings decorated with arches, and each opening faces one of the cardinal directions. The design of the arches over the openings is similar to the structure behind the thrones of the Rakhine Kings (*Srivatsa*). There are four seated Buddha images in Bhumisparsa mudra and *Varasana* sitting posture within the arches and each image has a distinguished lotus-bud *Usnisa*. Above

the roof of the image hall are three circular bands, successively diminishing in diameter. The bell is placed on it. The carve of the bell is first concave and then convex towards the top. The bell is decorated with rings. Above the bell is *datu-gabbha*. The ringed spire is placed on top of it. The spire which telescopically tapers upwards consists of nine rings. The uppermost ring or moulding contains the downturned lotus petals. After this comes a ring separating the downturned petals from the upturned petals. Above the lotus petal moulding is the banana bud. There is no *hti* (umbrella). The uppermost part of banana bud is broken. Thus *hti* on top of this miniature *ceti* cannot be seen properly at present.

A Fine Ancient Votive Tablet

Many ancient votive tablets had been discovered from the ruined *cetis* or pagadas together with the above-mentioned miniature bronze *cetis*.

Now let me present an ancient votive tablet of fine artistic workmanship. It is shaped like a leaf of *Enlightenment Bodhi* tree and three and a half inches



A fine ancient votive tablet.

high and two inches wide at its base. On this plaque Buddha sits on a lotus pedestal at the centre and making the earth-touching gesture in the Mahabodhi temple. The image performs Bhumisparsa mudra, *Vira-*

sana sitting posture and compassionate smiling face the same as the Mahamuni Image. This is the scene of Buddha's Enlightenment or Buddha in deep meditation. The image wears a very thin lotus robe.

Upon the image-hall is the bell-shaped portion which is decorated with pearls. Above the bell is *datugabba*. Above it is the spire consisting of five layers of moulding tapering telescopically upwards. On top of the ringed spire is the remarkable grand umbrella or *htidaw*.

We can see 4 miniature stupas, two on each side just like the present day

ones surrounding the main temple. The four stupas may refer to the four previous Buddhas namely *Kakusan*, *Gonagamana*, *Kassapa* and *Gotama*.

Besides; we can see two Bodhi branches extending from each side of the bell-shaped spire.

You can also see two waving flags on each side somewhat below the *hti-daw*. Hence, this numeral 4 may refer to the four previously existed Buddhas.

On both side of the pedestal, below the surrounding miniature stupas are two human figures kneeling in prayers. They may probably be Shin Sariputta and Shin Moggallana who were Buddha's two chiefs of disciples. This position of

the figures on the plaque is a usual art form of the traditional art of the *Theravada Buddhism*. However, in *Tantric* or *Mahayana Buddhism*, *Bodhisattva* figures are usually found on both sides of the Buddha image.

There is another human figure at the bottom of the Buddha image and pedestal, assumed to be the *Wathondarei*, the Earth Goddess, kneeling mostly towards the left but facing front. *Wathondarei*, in this form, is very common in Rakhine Buddhist art.

After a careful study of the structure of that votive plate, we find out the similarities between that votive tablet and one of the plaques from Bodhgaya. The plaque from Bodhgaya is 15 cm high and dated 9th century A.D.

(*Buddhism, Art and Faith*, p. 109, Edited by W-Zwalf.)

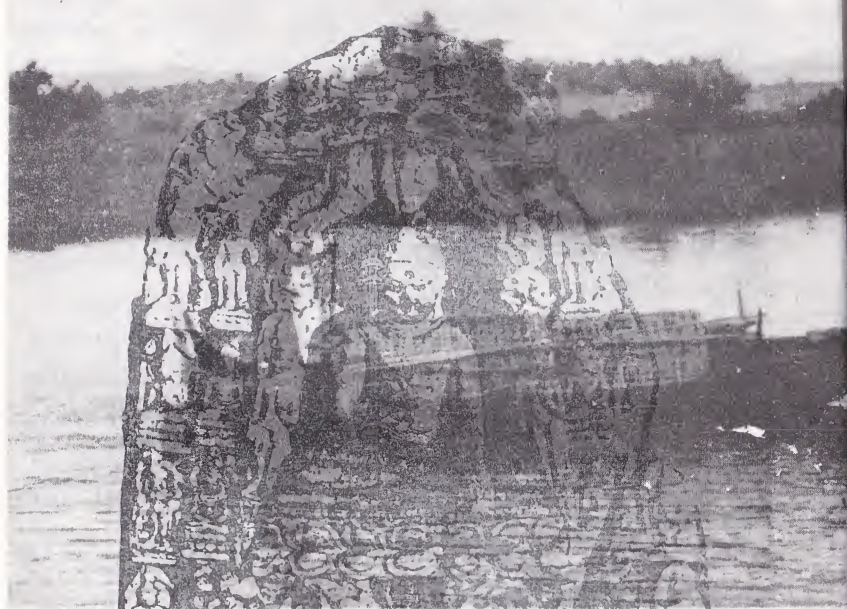
In conclusion, the presentation and enshrine-

ment of such plaque or votive plate is believed to be meritorious deeds.



Rakhine's Buddhist Art

(Buddhism, Art and Faith, p. 109, Edited by W-Zwalz.)
In conclusion, the presentation and enshrine-
ment of such plaque or
votive plate is believed to
be meritorious deeds.



THE KALADAN RIVER

Visitors can go to popular throughout the
Mahamuni Shrine by the Rakhine history. Kings
river route named and inhabitants of Rakhine
Kaladan, the main river in used this river whenever
Rakhine. The river has they wanted to pay their
been very useful and most devotions to Mahamuni.



According to the Manrique's
description in 1630 A.D,
Thirithu-dhamaraza, a king
of Mrauk-U dynasty made
his devotion to Mahamuni
with the tremendous water-

celebration along the
Kaladan river.

It is suggested that this
name, Kaladan was
derived from Kular-Tant.
According to local chro-
nicles, which can be
summarized as follows:

At one time, when the
upper Kaladan river was
flooded by heavy rain, a
prince who came from
Kapilavastu and his
princess, the daughter of a
local tribal chief, were
swept away in the river.
They swam for their lives
and finally landed on the
bank near Salagiri hill. The
river was therefore named
Kulartant (Kular = swim),
(tant = stop). Later on it
changed to Kulartan,
Kulardan, and Kaladan, etc.

The ancient name of
Kaladan river is Gaechabha-
nady. The term originates
from Pali word, meaning



The scenic beauty of Kaladan river.

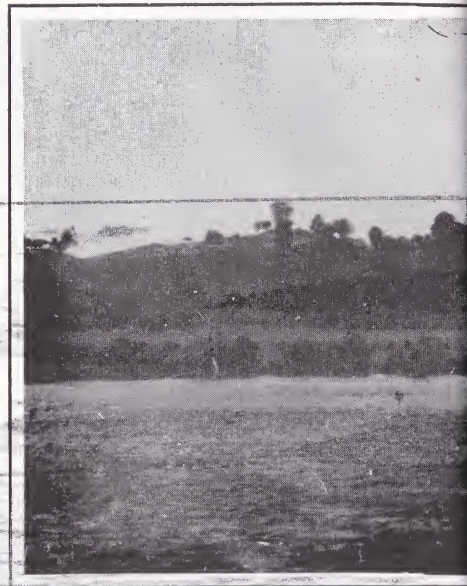


Mouth of Kaladan river scene.

“Tortoise-shell River”. Because there are many stones which look like tortoise-shell in the upper river. In winter one can see many *Siberian* geese in the river. Sometimes the great crocodiles are also found in the tidal creeks of Kaladan river.

THE URIT-TAUNG PAGODA

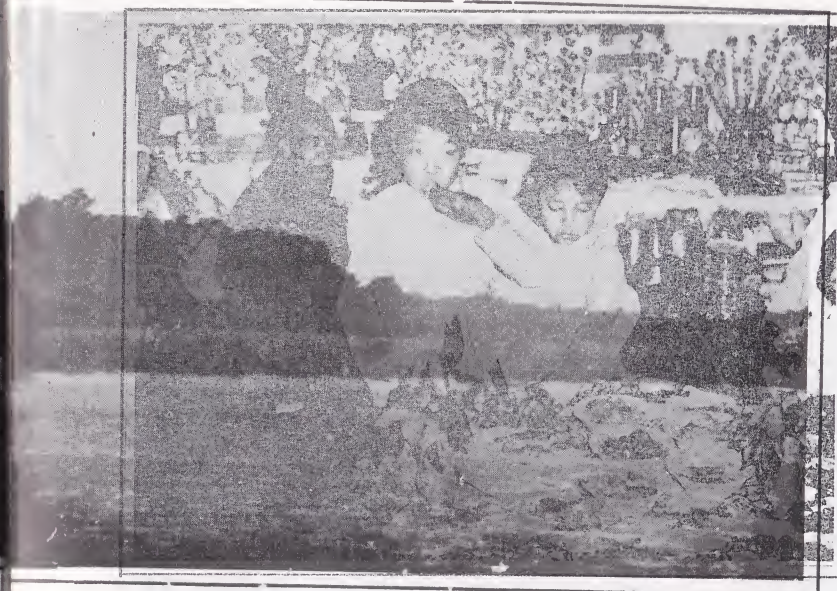
After travelling for an hour along the river route, one can see a pagoda on the left bank of the Kaladan river. This is Urit-taung pagoda, situated on top of a small hillock, 188 feet high, at a distance of 16 miles to the north of Sittway. The pagoda is 153 feet high, and the view from the pagoda's terrace is spectacular. The Kaladan river sparkles like diamonds in the sunshine and flowing down finely. When the sky is clear, you can see the distant land in all directions. In Mrauk-U King's period there had been a Rakhine naval base



in the Kaladan river at the foot of the Urit-Taung pagoda. The history of Urit-Taung pagoda was very interesting and related to the Mahamuni tradition.

Buddha held a discourse with his disciples, and then addressed Ananda thus.

"Further to the south and near the



The Urit-taung pagoda

Gacchabhanady there is a steep rocky hill known as the Salapab-bada; there I lived during one of My former existences. I was born as a Brahman versed in vedas; My skull measuring two palms (about 18 inches) in circumfer-
ence still remains there and will be enshrined in a Pagoda. I to be named Urit-Taung ceti. According to the Buddha's prophecy the Urit-Taung Pagoda was built by King Minphalung in 1574 A.D. to the Rakhine kings of Rakhine, even



MAHAMUNI TRADITION AND ITS INFLUENCE OVER RAKHINE SOCIETY

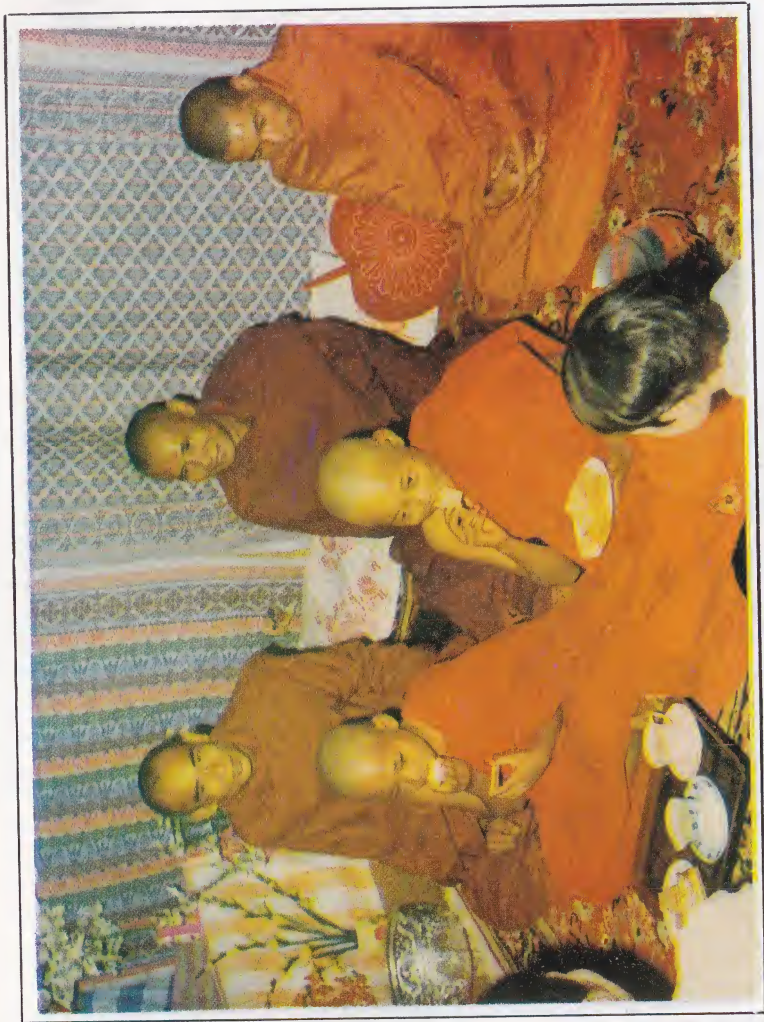
Royal Precedent

Mahamuni tradition is not an after-thought. It is genuinely old and was implicitly believed in by successive generations that came after it. According to the Rakhine history, kings of Rakhine, even

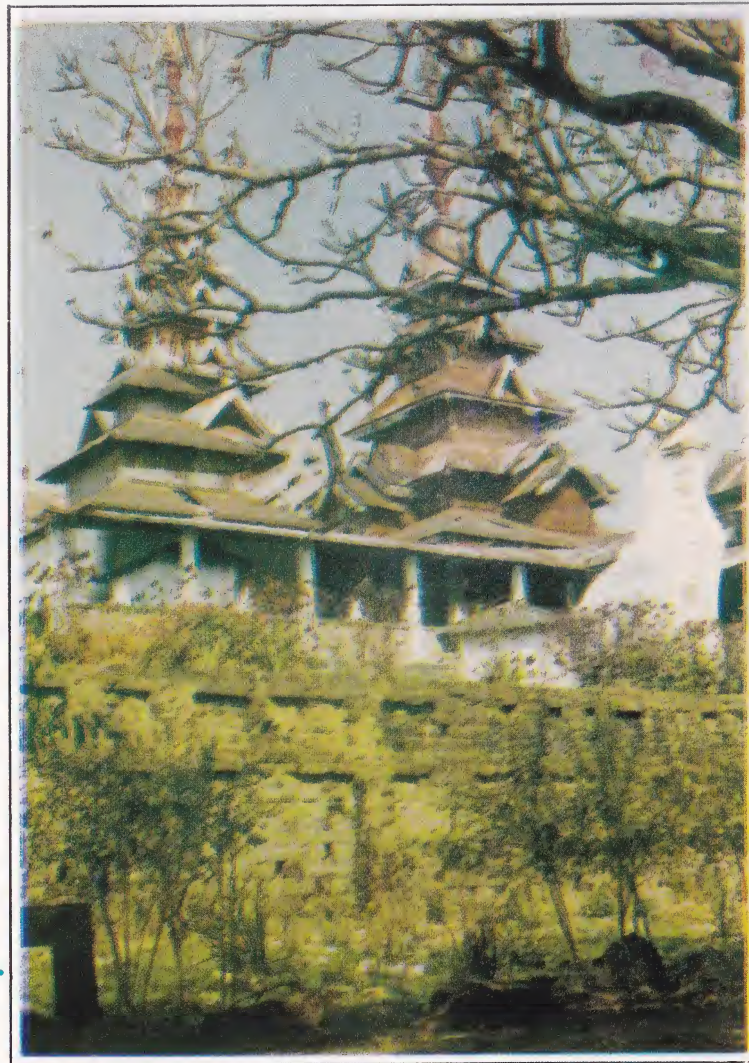
after they had moved their capitals to various other sites, always recognized that it was a sacred duty for them to visit it from time to time and generally made it the occasion for great religious feasts of charity. In such cases they



Offering of various kinds of rice and curry with joy.

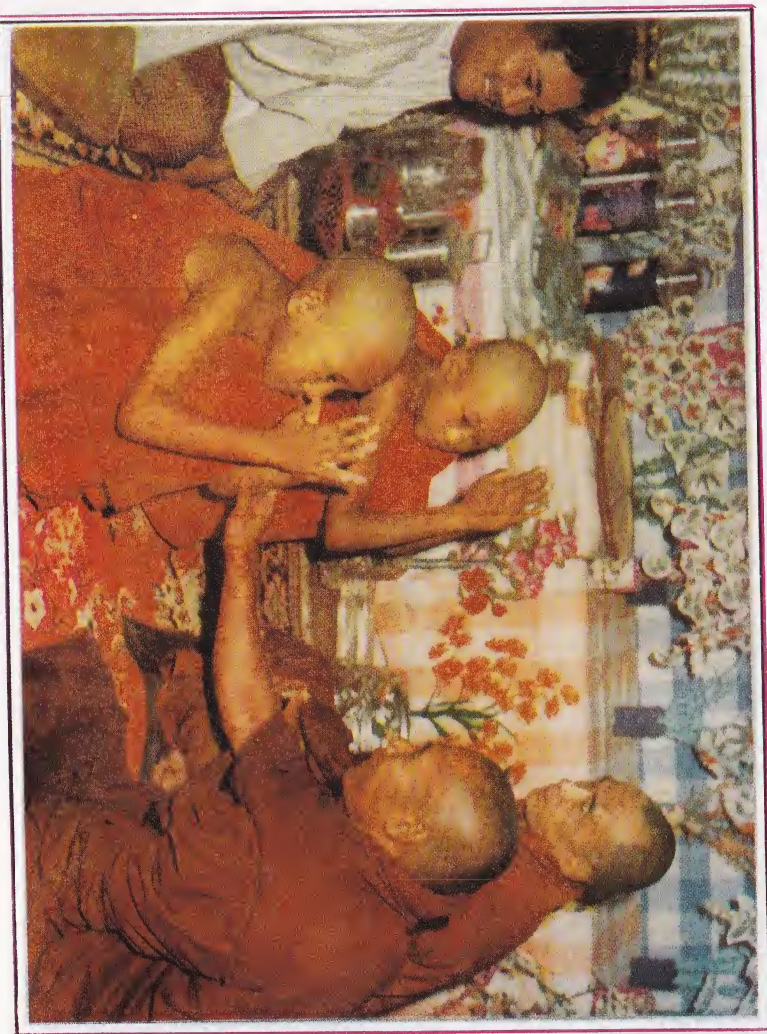


Pious offerings of the Theravada Buddhists.



A panoramic view of the Manamuni Shrine.

Monks Chanting at Shin-pyu-mingala.



New robe for the monk.



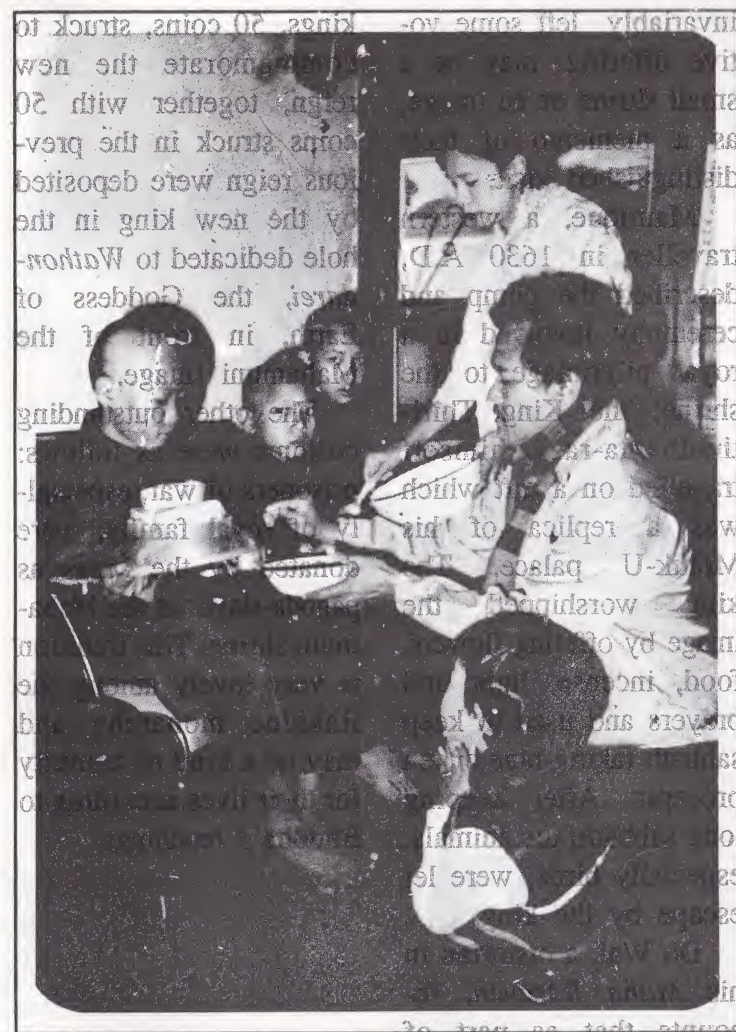
Devotion to Gotama Buddha



Shinpyumingala



Shinpyumingala begins with head-shaving.



With joy and offer various kinds of rice and curry.

invariably left some votive offering, may be a small shrine or an image, as a memento of their distinguished visit.

Manrique, a western traveller in 1630 A.D, described the pomp and ceremony involved in a royal pilgrimage to the shrine; the King Thirithudhama-raza himself travelled on a raft which was a replica of his Mrauk-U palace. The king worshipped the image by offering flowers, food, incense, light and prayers and used to keep sabbath taking nine or ten precepts. After keeping long sabbath, the animals, especially birds, were let escape by the king.

Do Wai, a historian in his *Maha Razawin*, recounts that as part of coronation ritual of Rakhine

kings, 50 coins, struck to commemorate the new reign, together with 50 coins struck in the previous reign were deposited by the new king in the hole dedicated to *Wathondarei*, the Goddess of Earth, in front of the Mahamuni Image.

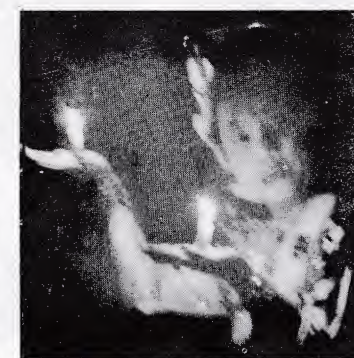
The other outstanding customs were as follows: prisoners of war, especially of royal family, were donated by the kings as pagoda-slaves at the Mahamuni shrine. This tradition is very lovely among the Rakhine monarchy and may be a kind of amnesty for their lives according to Buddha's teachings.



Long drums are auspicious symbols of the Rakhine nationals.

Public Religious Function

During the harvest time, new crops and first fruits were offered to Mahamuni Image by the people. Villagers cook fresh rice and make various size of pagodas on their plates and go together to the shrine with joyfulness.



Offering of lights to Mahamuni Image.

During the fine season, the lay people have noviciation ceremonies for boys who spend some time, usually a week or more, in a monastery under the guidance of a revered abbot to have the experience of the life of a monk. This ceremony is called *Shinpyu-mingala*.

During the period of

Wasoe, people used to keep sabbath taking eight silas or precepts.

In the month of *Ta-zaungmone*, the weaving festival is held in the Mahamuni Shrine. Girls from the villages sit under the full moon engaging in weaving competitions as they make new robes for the monks.



Five precepts (forbid taking life)
(Fishes are let escape)

Ancient Rakhine Coins

The sun and the moon are always inscribed in ancient Rakhine coins. They are the auspicious symbols of the Rakhine nationals. The symbols of the sun and the moon have some relations with the Mahamuni tradition.

Rakhine that the reason for expressing the symbols of the sun and the moon on the ancient coins is that King Sanda Suriya was regarded as the donor of the Mahamuni Shrine and as a hero who introduced Buddhism into Rakhine. The sun carries the meaning of loyalty, power, and



Ancient Rakhine coins.
(5th to 7th century A.D.)

The fact that King Sanda Suriya was the donor of the Mahamuni Shrine was expressed in previous chapter. *Sanda* means "the moon" and *Suriya* means "the sun". It is widely believed in Rakhine as a state of the Union of Myanmar.

Ancient Bronze Bells

After the sacred Mahamuni Image was casting, the shrine became the religious center of the kingdom and people of Rakhine became Buddhists. Its fame spread far and wide. Ever since the in-

troduction of Buddhism, Rakhine professed Buddhism without break up to the present. According to the *Theravada Buddhism*, bells are hung under the hti of caitya and hung at the terrace of pagodas. Peoples donate bells at the pagodas and monasteries



Inscribed ancient bell
(6th century A.D)

with the hope that they would have a sweet voice and oral power whether in the existing life or in the future existences. In addition, Buddhists strike the bells in order to achieve *Nirvana* after their meritorious deeds. Fortunately two inscribed ancient bells were found in the vicinity of Mahamuni Shrine. One of the bells seems to be a caitya bell and the other a monastery bell. The caitya bell is about 11.5 cm high and weighs over 2 lbs. The other monastery bell is 9.8 cm high and weighs half as heavy as the first one. Both of these bells are of the cup form and made of bronze. Generally these shapes resemble the top of a stupa. The shape is still used for bells in Myanmar today. Thus, it

is said that modern bells are derived from these bells. Two lines of writing were inscribed around the center of both bells. Palaeographically their casting time can be dated in the first quarter of the 6th century A.D. The language is a mixture of ancient Rakhine and *Sanskrit*. The inscriptions present the dedication by the donors for the benefit of their preceptors and their parents. These are pious offerings of the *Theravada Buddhists*. Such are the beliefs and practices of the present day Buddhists of Rakhine State. This may be related to the Mahamuni Tradition. Both of these inscribed bells are kept in Sittway at present. Visitors can see and study them in Buddhist Museums.

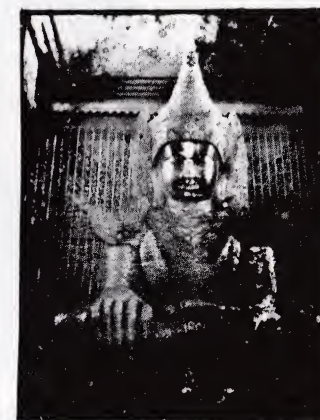


MAHAMUNI IN MANDALAY

I mentioned the long history of Mahamuni in page (12). Where I mentioned that the Image was carried by King Bodawpaya to Amarapura city (now part of Mandalay downtown area). Mandalay is the second largest city in Myanmar and the last capital of the Myanmar Kingdom. Thus Mahamuni Image became a favorite venue for religious worshipping in Mandalay. We should also remember the events caused by the powers of Mahamuni.

In Feb. 1785 (waxing moon of *Tabodwe* month, 1146, Myanmar Era) the Great Image Mahamuni was carried to Amarapura city by the crown prince of Amarapura by sea-route. When they reached Taunggoke, they found so many transport difficulties that the Great Image was carried on the carriages, passing the very steep and high Rakhine mountain range. The royal carpenter Thiri-eigarit took all the responsibilities of overseeing on it's long sacred journey. When they arrived Pantaung river-port, the severed parts were rejoined and carried again by river-route up the Ayeyarwady river on a golden *Karaweik* (a twin-hulled raft, looking like a huge duck-figure) as far as the Amarapura city. The most revered Image was warmly welcome by King Bodawpara on Tuesday, 12th waning day of the month "*Kason*", 1147 M.E (May, 1785. A.D).

A shrine was built in 1785 A.D by King Bodawpaya to house this Mahamuni Image according to the instructions of the then head of the Buddhist religious order. Because of the better transportation and good location, pilgrims came from various Buddhist



countries to pay their homage at the foot of the Great Mahamuni Image.

Thus Mahamuni Image became the focus of attention for the Buddhists from all walks of life, not only Kings and their royal families but also public worshippers as well.

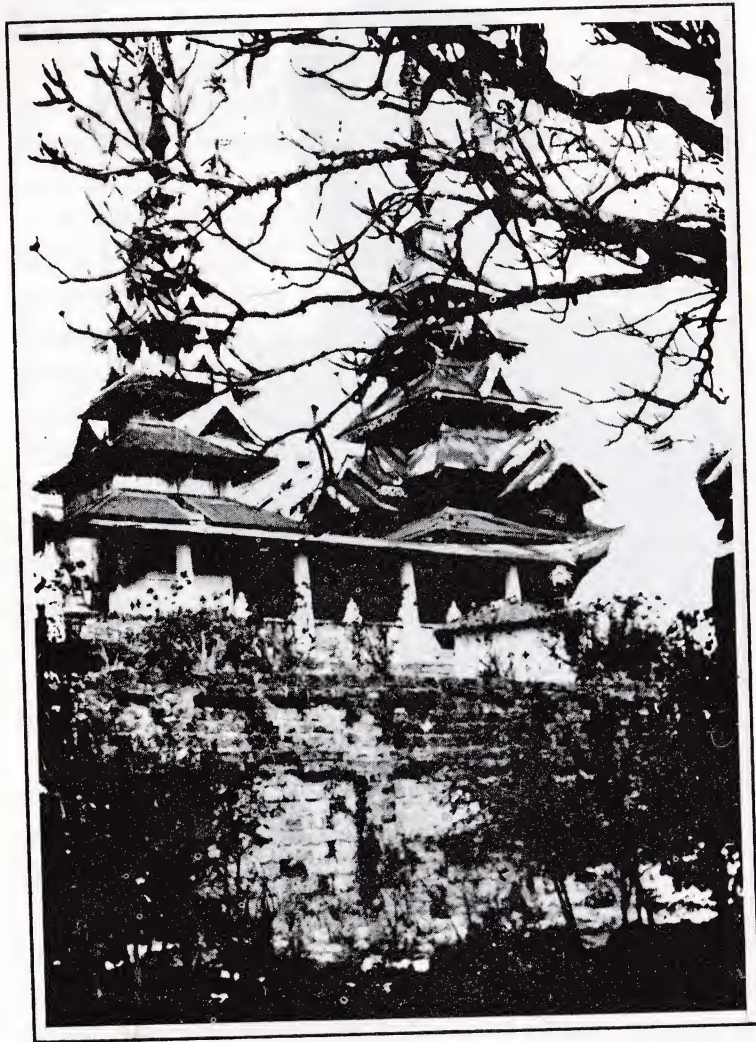
A hundred years later, the shrine was destroyed by fire in April 7, 1884. Although the original metal body of Mahamuni Image was not damaged by the fire, later donations such as golden crown, earrings, necklaces, waistband, gold robe and gold leaves were melted down to the floor and it was found that the melted gold was of pure gold and weighed 5450 visses. The shrine was reconstructed immediately after the fire. Some Buddhists believed that this event was probably caused by the unusual supernatural powers of Mahamuni Image. According to the Buddha's prophecies, (and Buddhists believed that) the Great Image Mahamuni shall exist for 5000 years (supposedly limited duration of Buddhist religion).

It was supported by the fact that Mahamuni Image still exists even though it has been destroyed and burnt down many times by the enemies on many occasions throughout the history.

Up to this day, the Image has been one of the most impressive sculptures in the Buddhist world in terms of both technology and iconography. It shows that the people of Myanmar of that period had already possessed



The attractive Bronze Statue



Mahamuni Shrine

the advanced metallurgical technology. Perhaps members of the families of metallurgy technicians who had accompanied the Great Image on its long journey to Amarapura, might have settled down near and around the shrine to tend it.

Today one can see the shopkeepers along the arched paved way and they can be assumed as the descendents of the Rakhine technicians. They sell a good variety of *Nirvana* Buddhist articles such as Buddha Images, bells and triangular brass gongs.

According to the Mahamuni annals, King Thebaw ordered the burnt-down shrine to be renovated immediately. On the 9th waning day of the month *Waso*, 1246 ME (1884 A.D). King Thebaw and his chief queen Supharalat donated the new golden crown that was worth 3 million coins of that time. In the same year they once again donated golden robes called in Myanmar "Shwe-pa-zun-kun robe" (golden-prawn-shell robe), which weighed one hundred visses.

On 29th November, King Thebaw and Queen Supharalat were forced to depart their palace by the British forces without royal proceedings on an bullock-drawn cart. King Thebaw asked permission from the British authorities



to have a chance of paying last homage to the Great Image Mahamuni but not allowed to do so.

Even though there had not been any king on the lion throne of Myanmar since 1885, the Great Image had not at all been neglected. Myanmar Buddhist nationals from all over the country continued to visit the Great Image and later they became more and more interested and had made contributions to the shrine. The general public got more chance to pay homage and make donations than in the past.

The first public donor was Ahnar Htapain Htika, who in 1898, built a new shrine for the Image. In 1916, a strong wind blew away the *htidaw* (tiered and ornamented finial of a pagoda of shrine) of Mahamuni Shrine. In 1918, Mainpyin-yatsauk maha-raja and queen mahadevi had the *htidaw* repaired and replaced and Nyaung-shwe maharaja donated *Sein-phu-daw* (bud-like ornament upon the vane of a pagoda or shrine).

At present the Mahamuni Shrine Stands as the most famous Buddhist religious site as well as the oldest historical site in and around Mandalay. It is also known as Mahamyatmuni or Payagyi or Rakhine Payagyi and situated about 2 miles south of downtown Mandalay on the road to Amarapura. The Image is twelve feet and a half high. The body, except the crown and the robe, is cast of five different kinds of metals. But later on, thousands of devout Buddhists came and pasted the figure with so many gold leaves that the layers of the



gold has become 1 to 3 inches thick in different areas of the body, though it does not affect the outline of the body very much and not greatly disfigured.

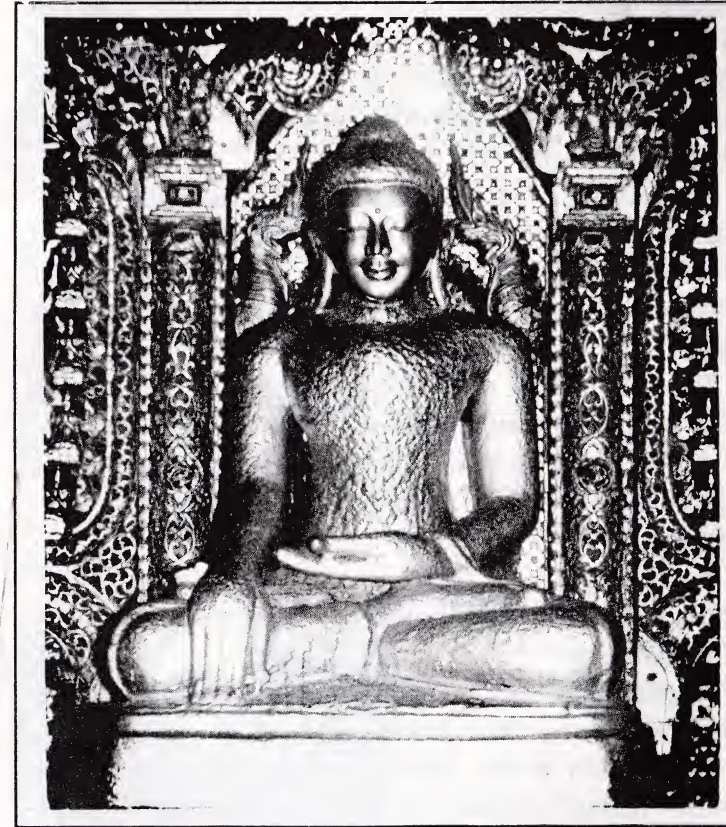
The face on which people are not allowed to paste anything still goes well the gold pasted body. The fact



that the proportion of the face and body does not seem to change is believed to be governed by the extraordinary powers of the Great Image.

In a separate small room in the shrine are six bronze statues which were taken from Rakhine together with the Mahamuni Image. Three are statues of lions, two of man and one of a three headed elephant. The history of these bronze sculptures is very interesting. Originally, these statues were placed as guardians of Cambodia's Angkor Wat. They were taken to Thailand in 1431 A.D but were carried again from Ayuthaya to Bago city by King Bayinnaung in 1563 A.D. 36 years later, in 1599 A.D, Min Razagyi, King of Rakhine, conquered Bago city and brought all of the bronze statues to his capital city of Mrauk-U. Finally King Bodawpaya took them to Amarapura in 1785 A.D.

Among these statues, two man-figures (warriors or temple guardians) are special attraction to visitors. It has been traditionally believed that these two figures have the mysterious power to cure almost all of the human diseases. When one becomes ill, one can cure his illness by simply touching the corresponding part or organ of the statue.



MAN-AUNG-MYIN BUDDHA IMAGE

If you have some spare time I would like to suggest you to go on a trip to Man-aung-myin Buddha Image at Zalun township. The image is closely related

to Mahamuni. Zalun lies some 100 miles northwest of Yangon on the eastern banks of Ayeyarwady. You can go there from Yangon by train or by ship. But the river route is probably the best way for visitors. They can have a chance of seeing the countryside and the scenarios in the delta area.

On account of its long history and mysterious events, Man-aung-myin Image is regarded as one of the most venerated and famous Buddha Images in lower Myanmar. Pilgrims have come to pay homage various regions for many years.

I mentioned in a previous chapter that Amarapura army led by the crown prince, conquered Dhanyawaddy.

At that time, Mahamuni Image in Dhanyawaddy was the focus of attention and the goal of Buddhist worshippers.

So he wanted the Great Image moved to his homeland and he achieved his aim by trying to take it away to Amarapura.

During their long journey, they had to pass the very rough and dangerous Rakhine mountain path.

In addition to the Buddha Image, they carried 30 bronze Khmer statues, 64 sets of Buddhist *Pitakat*, several 30 feet long great cannons and innumerable manuscripts.

One may find it very difficult to explain why these massive sculptures and heavy bronze cannons were transported over too steep and pathless mountain sides.

Nevertheless, when they reached the bank of Ayeyarwady during the early months of 1147 ME, they did not experience difficulties and hardships and they delightfully carried them on the last quarter of their long journey, and they had good reason to be delighted and it was really worth carrying.

According to the local annals, even the Kings of Bagan including the most powerful king Anawrahta had tried 3 times to take the Great Mahamuni Image from the Dhanyawaddy Kingdom, but only in 1785 A.D were they finally successful. And as a result, the crown prince and his father King Bodawpara became heroes in the history of Konbaung dynasty.

As mentioned above, two more images of Buddha were also carried together with the Mahamuni on the same journey.

One of them is called Man-aung-myin which used



to be seated on the right side of Mahamuni and the other is "Shwe-bon-tha" which used to be seated on the left of the Mahamuni. They were called younger brothers of Mahamuni and were cast at the same time.

The crown prince, on the request of the

Rakhine families and local inhabitants near Pyi-Padaung region, built a new shrine on the way for housing the Shwe-bon-tha image.

The other one Man-aung-myin Buddha Image was carried up to the Amarapura city together with the Great Mahamuni Image.

The Man-aung-myin is notable for its highly venerated and supernatural powers. It was believed among the royal family to be the original resemblance of Buddha and it was the highly priced image exclusively for the royal family. It was placed in a golden shrine in front of the royal palace. That is why it was called Nan-Oo-Paya.

In 1852, the Nan-Oo or Man-aung-myin paya was carried reverently on the chief queen's allowance to Zalun town by U Shwe Bwint during the 2nd Anglo-Myanmar war.

The Image is 3 feet and 10 inches high and weighs 666 visses and 6 tickles.



In 1885, during the British occupation of lower Myanmar, the Image Man-aung-myin was forcefully removed to Bombay with the aim of melting it and casting it into coins. British authorities had been able to melt the other images and cast them into coins for use in British Empire. But in the case of Man-aung-myin Image, the British surprisingly found that they could not melt it and believed it to be the most mysterious and holy object among the Buddhist sculptures.

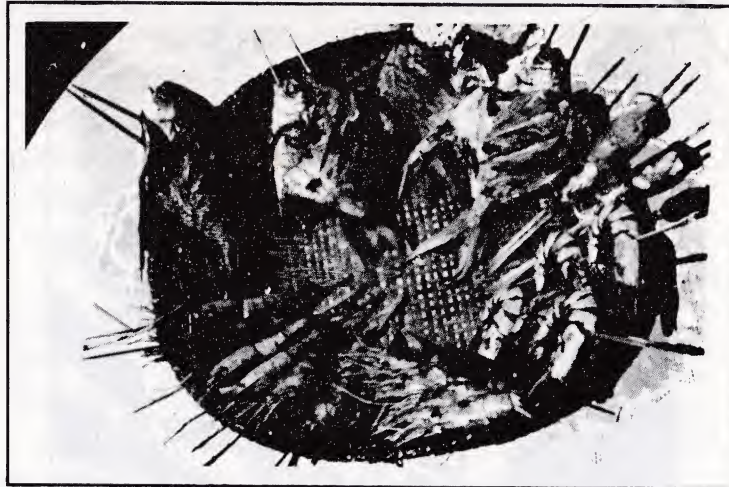
At last, the mysterious Buddha's Image was sent back to its original place in Zalun in 1857 A.D and you can see it still there. Hence, it was called Pyi-daw-pyan paya.



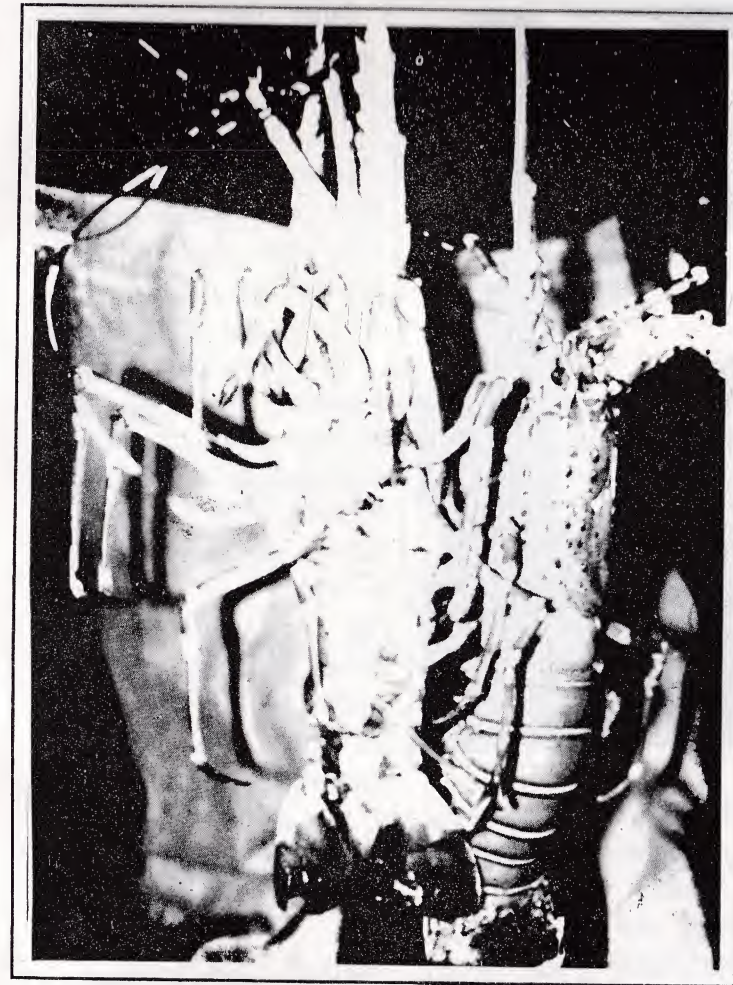
GENERAL INFORMATION

If you decide to pay a visit to the Mahamuni Shrine, then you are bound to see the very pleasant scenarios, ancient pagodas and art forms. I would like to suggest that you take your camera and sufficient films to take documentary photographs.

High class hotels are being constructed and you can find ordinary guest-houses everywhere in every town, so that you won't find it very difficult to put up. Even if you can not get a tour guide, the members of the board of trustees are always ready to help you and to show you around.



Attractive Sea food



*Crabs, sharks and lobsters attraction tourist.
They are quite abundant in Rakhine.*



Other very interesting archaeological remains in Rakhine, such as ancient coins, bronze bells, and images, are kept safely in the old monasteries. If you want to find these documents your guide will tell you what to do.

The best time to visit Rakhine is during the Winter and Summer seasons (October to May) because of the heavy rain falls in the rainy season, in which rain falls can rise as high as 200 inches. Rakhine State lies mainly within the tropical zone. The average temperature is about 78.

F. Situated very close to the sea, it is neither extremely hot nor cold. You will need only a suitcase containing light clothes. In winter, you should wear a sweater or a jacket.

Regarding your health, malaria and stomach disorders can probably be a problem on your visit to Rakhine if you don't take care of yourself. Therefore,

antibiotics, anti-malarial drugs and other first-aid items should also be packed in your suitcase. You can order boiling water at the guest houses, if necessary.

Various Rakhine foods are normally hot and spicy. Chinese dishes are also available at the local restaurants. Fresh sea-food is very popular in Rakhine. A wide variety of fresh sea-food is available at your guest-house. Besides, Rakhine Mohdi (or) Mohinga is very wellknown. One can have a taste of Rakhine Mohdi almost everywhere.

Finally, all Rakhine nationals are honest and frank. They take pride in their heritage of Buddhist Art. They show eagerness to tell their traditional culture and their long history without any omission.

Mahamuni Bagawa

မဟာမုနိ ဘဂဝါ

Nei'san Palaytu Man

နိဇ္ဇိ ပါလေတု မံ

Thada

ထဒါ။

Buddhasāsanam Ciram Titthatu

Tun Shwe Khine

GLOSSARY

Abhaya mudrā = gesture signifying reassurance, with the right hand held up, palm exposed and the left hand pointed downward. It represents the promise of protection, tranquility and fearlessness given by the Buddha to His disciples.

Ānanda = cousin and favorite disciple of the Buddha.

Antaravasaka = undercloth worn by Buddhist monks tied around waist

Bhumisparsa mudrā = gesture of calling the earth to witness; right hand pendent as if pointing to the earth, and the left hand lies palm upward on the Buddha's lap. This is the most common mudra.

Bodhi tree = tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment.

Bodhisattva = future Buddha.

Brahmā = Creator of Universe.

Brahmans = astrologers; member of the highest Hindu caste.

Buddha = Blessed One; one who has attained enlightenment and broken the cycle of reincarnation or rebirth (Samsara).

Buddhism = the teaching of Gotama Buddha the way to achieve Nirvana.

Ceti (or) Cetiya = religious monument; pagoda.

Devas = spirit being; goddess.

Devātideva = King of devas.

Dharmacakra mudra = gesture signifying the setting in motion of the wheel of the law by the Buddha; symbol of Buddha's teaching.

Dharmacakra = wheel of the law.

Dhātu-gabba = a part of pagoda in which a relic of a Buddha.

Dhyanamudra = gesture or pose of meditation, hands resting in lap, right above left, with fingers extended.

Dvārapāla = door guardian.

Enlightenment = attainment of Buddhahood.

Hti daw = summit of pagoda.

Karaweik = the royal bird, mythological water bird.

Kason = second month of Myanmar calendar (April/May).

Kutis = 10 millions.

Lokapala = guardian of the (earthly) world.

Mahabodhi = see Bodhi tree.

Mahāsakkarī = ancient Myanmar Era, Buddha's life time.

Mahāyāna = The Great Vehicle.

Modhi = traditional and very popular Rakhine breakfast dish found at many streets stalls, it consists noodles and fish soup.

Naga = serpent spirit.

Nats = see Devas.

Pagoda = a monument erected over the relics of Buddha; traditional Buddhist religious structure; a solid hemispherical or gently tapering cylindrical structure worshipped by Buddhist as representing Gautama Buddha mahaparinirvana.

Pitakat = Buddhist scriptures.

Prabhavali = halo behind head of deity.

Sadhu = well-done.

Sakra = King of devas; king of gods.

Sanda = the moon.

Sangha = Buddha's disciples, member of Buddhist Order, monk.

Sanskrit = ancient Indian language in which most Buddhist philosophical texts were written.

Sima = ordination hall for Buddhist monks.

Srivatsa = Symbol of the earth; auspicious sign.

Stupa = see pagoda.

Suriya = the sun.

Tabodwe = eleventh month of Myanmar calendar (Jan-Feb).

Tantric Buddhism = advanced stage of Mahayana Buddhism.

Tazaungmone = eight month of Myanmar calendar (Oct-Nov).

Theravāda Buddhism = Buddhism practicing or dominant in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia; teaching of the elders.

Trivali = three lines around neck of deity.

Usnisa = cranial protuberance of Buddha Image.

Uttarasanga = robe of Buddhist monk, upper garment.

Varada madra = The arms of the standing Buddha are half out-stretched in front of the body in this post and the palms are opened out and the tips of the fingers point downward. It is believed to be a sign of the Buddha's blessing on followers.

Virasana = a kind of sitting posture.

Viss = unit of measure, equal to 3.5 lbs.

Visvakarman = Sakra's follower as a carpenter; spirit.

Wasoe = fourth month of Myanmar calendar (June-July).

Wathoundarei = The Earth goddess.

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Myanmar is widely known as "The Land of Pagodas" or "The Golden Land" all over the world. It has scenic beauty and historical remains which are inextricable and remarkable. Innumerable pagodas belonging to all ages can be found throughout the country. Wherever one looks within the country one will see Buddha images, temples, simas and pagodas on almost every mound and every hillock.

The Great Mahamuni Buddha Image is one of the most famous of them. This Image is both a sacred religious structure and the repository of the spirit of the entire Myanmar Buddhist people. The location of the Mahamuni Image was Rakhine Dhanyawaddy region which was the inevitable route in the propagation of Theravada Buddhism and Indian influenced culture to various parts of East Asia and South-east Asia.

In this book, the author gives a vivid and detailed description of the Mahamuni Golden Image which is both rich and authentic in architectural and historical value of ancient Rakhine.



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A Guide To
MAHAMUNI

*The highly venerated golden image of Buddha
with authentic long history.*

by

TUN SHWE KHINE, M.A.